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Galaxy

MAGAZINE

SCIENCE FICTION

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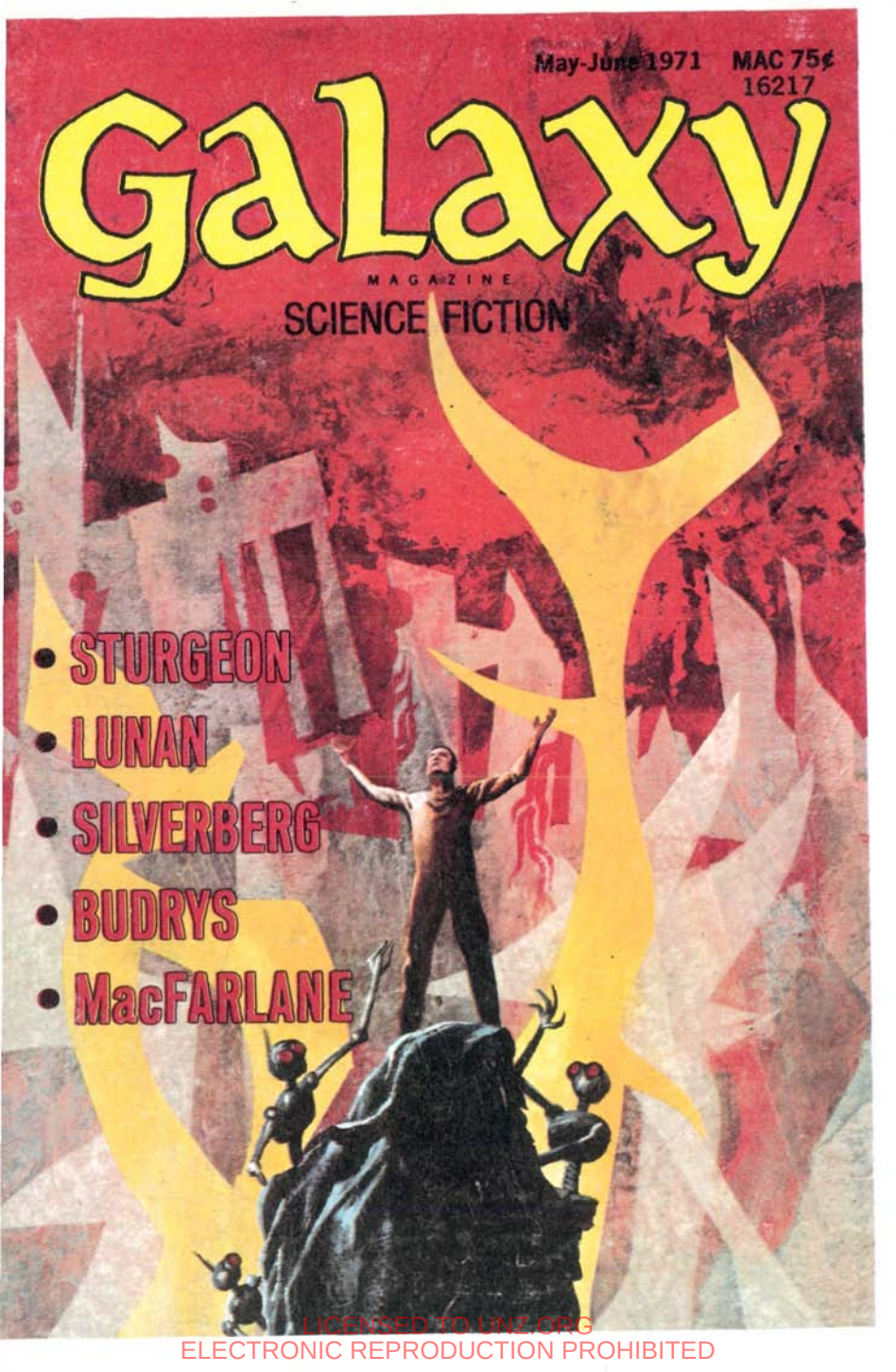

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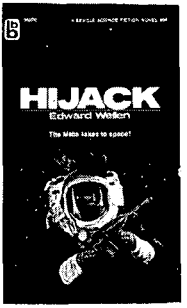

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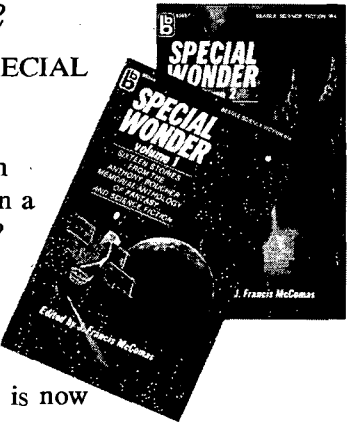

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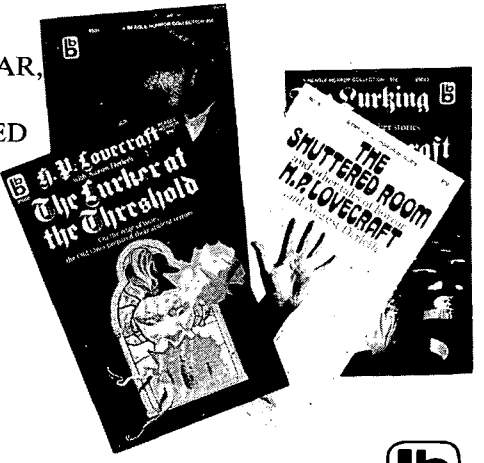

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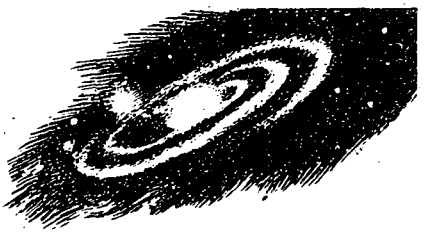

MAGAZINE

ALL STORIES NEW

Galaxy is published in French, German, Italian, Japanese and Spanish. The U. S. Edition is published in Braille and Living Tape.

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LETTERS 3

Some time ago I suggested in this space that human intelligence, if it existed at all, should in the light of current needs be considered wealth. All right, I've just spent three days and far into nights in the hall of diamonds.

With you.

Bernard Williams, our associate publisher, resident cynic and rainmaker during dry spells—and one of the best friends you and I could have—made up the December reader poll. Bern is also the author of one of the most widely published texts (all English-speaking countries and ten foreign languages) on psychometrics, the science of measurement of psychophysical processes.

In a sense both you and I were undergoing psychometric testing in the poll. You scored brilliantly. You came through wide-angle, glittering, *en masse*, and with fine detail in the closeups. And you shape up like an editor's dream.

The response has been great and the results uniformly gratifying. Actually questionnaires and letters are still coming in but more than enough are on hand to give us a definite picture.

Wide-angle first: more than two-thirds of *Galaxy's* brain trust—you folks—are in age from 18 (55% in college) to 39. The educational level of this group is tops—74.4% college or better. The age groups at each end of the spectrum are split fairly evenly. The oldest reader to send in a questionnaire to date is 73—he extended his subscription.

Robert A. Heinlein's *I Will Fear No Evil* (concluding installment) and Robert Silverberg's *We Are Well Organized* handily won the best story in the issue vote by splitting almost exactly 50% of the total ballots. James Blish's *Darkside Crossing* was a fairly close third—Stephen Tall's *The Mad Scientist And The FBI*, fourth.

Here are some of your reactions to key questions:

1) *I don't like fantasy mixed in with science fiction.* The trick phrasing here was deliberate: a) the question was an important one; the argument is as old as sf and we wanted you to do a double take, think it over and answer from conviction; b) Bern and I had been arguing about this, hammer and tongs, and the question was loaded in case you weren't looking.

But you were looking and Bern was the first to congratulate me—64% of you rephrased the statement to: *I like (occasional fantasy* . . . or otherwise left no doubt.

Actually I don't like to mix most fantasy with sf—but I want to be able to run a work like Blish's *Day After Judgment* in *Galaxy* when I have the chance. It doesn't happen daily.

So thank you.

2) Nearly 80% of you gave *four-letter-and-cussword* freedom of expression to *Galaxy*—but let me pledge you this: I won't buy them

(Please turn to page 165)

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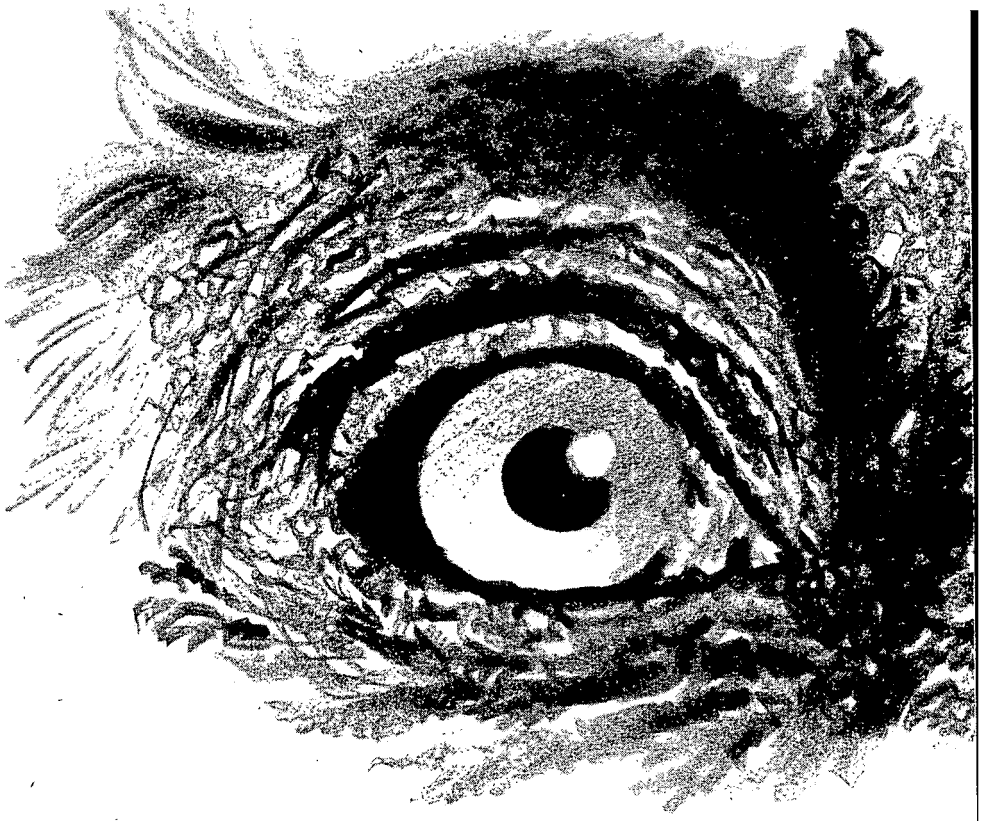

Wisdom—for some the power to kill, for others the reason to die!

TIP OF THE ICEBERG

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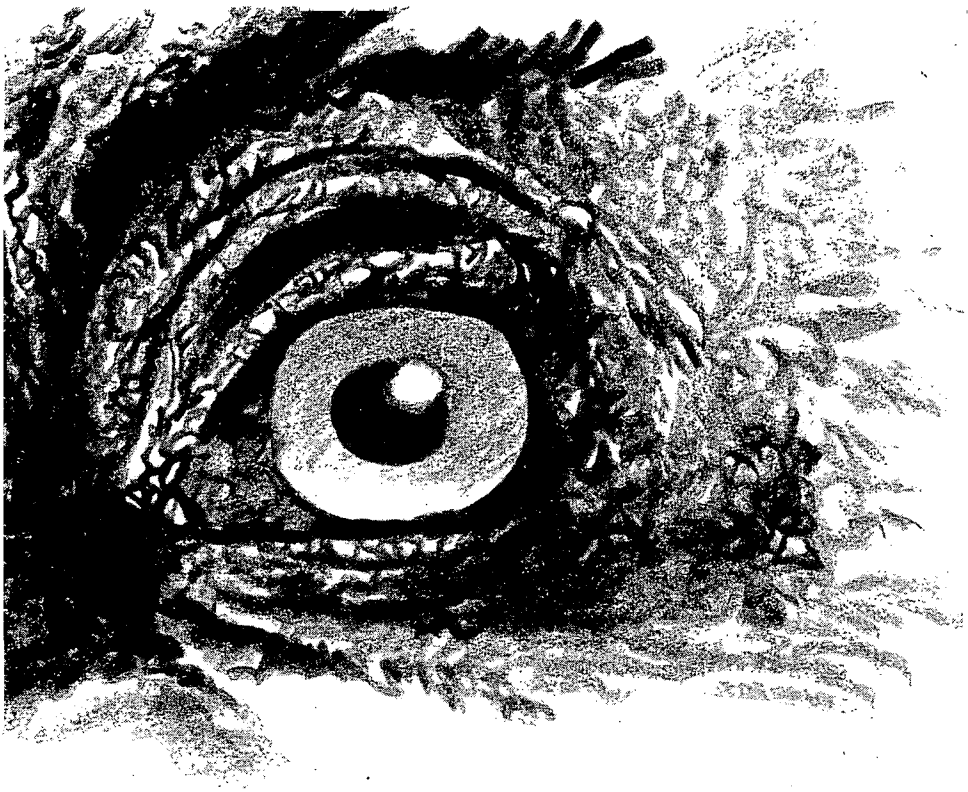

ERNEST HILL

THE man from the ministry was coming. Today. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. Or had it been yesterday? Yesterday and yesterday and yesterday. It was summer and a fine morning. Afternoon. Yes—afternoon. He had had his lunch, so it was afternoon. The sun high and the swallows, sweet sister swallows, dot-dancing above the trees presaging fine days to come. Peter Sanderson lit his pipe and walked slowly to the French windows looking out to the long, downward slop-

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ing rose garden. His eye followed the irregular line of the bushes petering out where the undulating bank curved into an even parabola ending at the willows, drooping over a river's course in sinusoidal loops across the meadows and into the woods behind. No. It had not been yesterday and yesterday and yesterday. The words had not been said. The conversation rehearsed only in his own mind. The problem had not been resolved.

The problem—yes. Was it—had it indeed been a problem? Here, buried in a quiet garden behind a smiling Tudor house in a tiny depopulated village, the few scattered buildings of his workshops and laboratories—Sanderson's zoo—landscaped and blended into the countryside, problems of any sort became no more than academic exercises. Solutions were found, theses written, findings tabulated into typescript, folded and placed into large buff envelopes and posted away. That was the end and solution to all problems. Sometimes large, stiff envelopes arrived of their own accord. Sealed and stamped with curious insignia. "Top secret." "Urgent." "Immediate" "Priority." "Destroy after perusal." And a host of other meaningless titles to the trumpery within. You scanned them at your leisure, considered the requirements, tested, experimented and, in your own good time, supplied the answers. You did not ask yourself what it was the little people in the cities might do with your findings or why they needed the information in the first place. At least, he had never considered the oddities of their demands until now. Not until the envelope had arrived with more seals and stamps than most.

It had been delivered by hand, he remembered. Someone in a blue—or had it been a khaki uniform? Dropping onto the garden pad in an autogyro. Marching with a left-right crunch up the chipped crazed paving path and snapping his hand up to the peak of his cap. He had insisted on seeing the document placed in the safe before he left.

Peter Sanderson opened the French windows and smiled whimsically as he stepped out to the lawn and settled himself in the garden chair under the sycamore. They had had difficulty in finding a safe, he remembered. Had settled finally for a refrigeration cabinet used otherwise for cultures of some of the more deadly plagues. It had seemed safe enough even to the much-bemedaled comedian with the gold braid.

He had not considered the man particularly odd at the time. The city people were always odd. Everything had seemed straightforward enough when he had found time to open the envelope

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and study the requirements. The job of any scientist was to supply only the overall evaluation. To tell them what was and what was not possible. To give guidelines they would afterward translate into computer language and feed into their production controls.

Yes, he thought, drawing on his pipe and letting the smoke curl up to where a thrush was trilling on an outward-spreading branch. *From the great, windowless dungeons of their cities, from all their automated production and cybernetics, they have to come down to an ordinary man in the end to do their thinking for them. They can only develop what we, detached from it all, give them to play with. Neither they nor all their machines can invent any new thing or even ask themselves an objective question. Why are we doing it? Is this what we really want? Where do we want to get to? Is there a better way?*

As long as the scientist supplied the answers expected of him and came up with a regular supply of new ideas they would leave him in peace in his primitive surroundings with flowers in his gardens and the absurdity of windows in his walls to look out upon something he seemed unaccountably—and from their point of view, perversely—to want to see. A scientist should never interfere or question their right to a knowledge that was any man's for the asking if he knew what the questions should be.

The man from the ministry was on his way now. A black dot among the dipping of the swallows, hovering over the trees. The pilot was probably checking his charts and looking for some sort of concrete pad in the absence of the usual flat roof to land on. He would find himself a spot in the end. His jets would scorch a black patch in the meadow and the cows with their ungainly udders swinging would amble around, chew and stare at him. The man from the ministry would be helped from his seat. Something thin and black would descend the steps, a briefcase on one side and an umbrella on the other. A gray, amorphous shading between the hard brim of the hat and the crisp whiteness of the collar. A face perhaps. The striped trousers and polished shoes would pick their way carefully through the cowpats and trample on the buttercups. The gray-black wraith would bend, bow stiffly and extend a cuff-white hand, cold and moist as the tail of a fish.

"Heigh-ho!" Peter Sanderson sighed. "Better go and meet him, I suppose."

WHAT a pleasant surprise to find the face under the regulation Homburg hat ruddy, pleasant and—what was more—vaguely

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recognizable. He had met the man some time. Either last week or twenty-five years ago. A large hand outstretched, a firm grip followed by a genial pumping. Hardly the hand of the minister of—what was it—Research and Development? Astronautics? Ergonomics, ecology and materials supply?

"Don't I—?"

"You remember me? Wilfred Wannemaker. We were at Harwell together."

"Were we indeed?"

The name was remotely familiar, the face also. Harwell. What or who was Harwell—or what was it Harwell had once been? Some sort of university. Imperial College of Science and Technology. Yes, he had been to Harwell. He had graduated at Harwell twenty—or was it forty?— years ago. What had a minister of whatever it was to do with Science and Technology? Ministers were not technocrats. Ministers were not anything that he had heard of.

"Yes—of course we were!" Wannemaker seemed excessively jovial, he noticed. "I graduated in Twenty-one-fifty. You had already gone down by then, of course. A legend and an inspiration to all of us. Honors in everything. My goodness, yes! We all knew what the future had in store for you. And look at you now! Where we who were proud to know you were all confident you would finish up!"

Peter Sanderson untied and retightened the knot in the necktie twisted around the wasitband of the tweed trousers that, adjust them as he might, always managed to slip down over his meager hips, leaving a bulge behind and a frayed turn-up trapped under the left shoe heel.

"Where am I?" he asked curiously.

"Now—come now, Professor!" The man who had called himself Wannemaker smiled. "You know very well where you are. What? With all of us in the ministries hanging on to your every word? You are without doubt the leading anthropologist in the world today."

"Anthropologist, you say?"

"Would that not be correct? I know of course of your reputation as a biologist, endocrinologist, ecologist—to name but a few—ha-ha—might one say?"

"Interesting," he murmured. "Very interesting."

"Surely you are aware of your own reputation?"

"I am aware of very few things that happen in the cities and the—shall we say developed areas of society? You appear to think highly of my work. I am very gratified. I was not aware that I was so well known outside my own quite academic circle."

"Your contributions to the society you shun are well known, Professor—and appreciated. The

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tangible results of your theoretical studies are probably more far-reaching than you imagine. We all—in the various lands of the West—sleep more soundly in our beds in the knowledge that you are there."

"Do you indeed?" he reflected. "But only in the West? I had hoped that all mankind—" There was a blackbird hopping on its yellow stilt legs behind the gladiolas. Black like the minister and, in the limited enclave of the garden, considerably more important. "Tell me," he asked suddenly. "I recently had a visit from a very exalted personage in some military attire. He seemed moved by the desire to salute me at every turn. Would that phenomenon have been due in some measure to what you term—my reputation?"

"That, Professor, was General First Class Alexander Dunweather."

"As I thought, as I thought. Somewhat renowned in his own field, no doubt?"

"But surely, Professor, you know. General Dunweather is Supreme Allied Commander, Strategic Space and Satellite Forces Western Europe."

"And he saluted me? Well now, I am more flattered than I knew I was at the time."

"Shall we go inside, Professor? We have a lot to discuss concerning General Dunweather and the project on which you have been working."

"Project? What project? Ah, yes! The large, buff envelope with many seals and stamps that the good general did me the honor of delivering personally into my own hands. And from there to the refrigeration cabinet. Certainly we will discuss it. The matter has been very much on my mind of late. You would like a sherry, no doubt?"

It would, of course be a sherry, Wannemaker thought, holding the clear crystal glass to the light. And served in an antique receptacle blown from a heavy and preposterously unsuitable medium. Probably not a single lightweight plastic utensil in the house.

They live utterly in the past, these academic types. Incredible how a man can work and even think with the distraction of the daylight and the outside world streaming in through glass holes in the walls. Sitting, even, under a tree with the damp, unconditioned wind blowing through his unprotected, natural hair. Myself, I should die of rheumatism at an early age and, lacking the society and competition of my fellows, I should achieve nothing at all. Boredom would stultify my every effort. And yet perhaps . . .

"I envy you, Professor."

"My dear fellow! You graduated, you tell me. You, too, could

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have chosen the academic life. All of us seem to have slipped away to our various little hidey-holes. There are plenty more if you look for them. Population seems, I have noticed, to be dwindling fast."

"I am afraid the city called me. Politics. A sense of service to my fellows, you might say. I developed early on, I suppose, those qualities of leadership—I set out on a search for—"

"Power?" the professor asked, mildly.

"Yes," he said. "Yes. I suppose you could call it that. Power. I achieved it, you know. I have power now in a certain measure."

"My congratulations."

"You are somewhat contemptuous, Professor. But you, too, whether you like it or not, have power. Considerably more than I have or could hope to attain."

"You are about to explain to me a pronouncement I can only at this moment regard as cryptic."

"Yes," Wannemaker agreed. He emptied his glass, got up and walked to the large brick fireplace, smoke-grimed and so authentic-looking it was impossible not to imagine that it was sometimes, in winter, put to its original use. An inadequate incinerator and an ineffectual radiator and convector of heat. He found the hearth, however, a suitable platform and, leaning on the mantel, looked down curiously at the slight, ill-clad figure comfortably buried in the floral tapestry of a deep-cushioned armchair.

"PROFESSOR SANDERSON," he said. "I, with some scientific training, have done my best to fathom your report on the Dunweather project. I confess I am at a loss. You have apparently, in excess of our most optimistic forecasts, achieved a breakthrough. And yet you have seen fit to present your findings in terms of—shall we say, a philosophical treatise? If we interpret you correctly you are unwilling to supply details of your experiments because of your misgivings about some ultimate but unnamed harm that might befall the human race as a result of the wider applications of your technique. Do I read you correctly?"

Peter Sanderson rummaged in his bulging pockets for his tobacco pouch and matches. He filled his pipe carefully and lit it to his satisfaction before replying.

"You do," he said.

"I need hardly tell you, Professor, that for an academic to imagine himself capable of deciding on the utilitarian aspect of his theories is, in a modern industrialized society, is—well—is"

"Unthinkable?"

"You must see, Professor—"

"But I do see, Mr.—er—your name is Wannemaker, I believe?

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Yes, I do see. But you mentioned power, Mr. Wannemaker. I have never wished for positive power—the sort of authority I do not doubt you exercise. I am quite content to leave the decision inherent in running a conglomerate society to the heads of that society. But you are quite right. I do have this power in a negative sense. I am in a position to give you what you require but I do not intend to do so. That is what one might term the negative aspect of my authority."

Wannemaker drew himself to his full and considerable height. He was tall and, in the eyes of his colleagues on committee, a distinguished figure. When he spoke good committee men fell into a respectful silence, nodding like teazles in the warm winds of his eloquence. But now, meeting the bright, smiling eyes of the small figure in the chair, he hesitated, uncertain whether to threaten with a quick cut-off of funds or cajole with an emphasis on every man's duty to the state.

"Yes?" Peter Sanderson asked, mildly.

"Professor—"

"Yes?"

"You are aware, are you not, of the reasons behind General Dunweather's concern? We have intelligence that the Russians, who have been experimenting with this form of communication for some years, have achieved a breakthrough. From ground station to distant starship, we are told. We don't know its extent, or how effective it will prove, but it has become obvious that such a possibility exists."

"And we should not be left behind?"

"Certainly we should not."

"No," he said. "I see that."

He sucked at his pipe for a while and a tabby cat, padding in from the garden, jumped silently onto his lap, curled up and went to sleep. He continued to sit staring through the windows, seeing in his mind's eye, although Wannemaker was not aware of it, the upsurge of a mushroom cloud that had burgeoned for the same reasons in the necessity to forestall its development by the wrong side. But the mushroom was history and would have been there in the end whatever any man had done. Knowledge is like that. It is any man's for the asking. Suddenly he knocked out his pipe and stuffed it back into his trousers pocket. Removing the cat, he got to his feet.

"Come," he said. "You have not understood the philosophical—as you call them—reasons for my refusal to proceed any further with telepathic methods of contact. I will give you a practical demonstration."

HE LED the way down a long, timbered passage and out

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through a heavy, iron-studded door. So quickly did he move that the minister, with by far the longer pair of legs, had difficulty in keeping up with him on the graveled drive that led to a sparse colony of scattered outbuildings among the trees.

"What do you suppose was my first experiment?" He threw the words over his shoulder while the rocks wheeling above the elm trees gossiped and squawked among themselves.

"I've naturally no idea."

The professor stopped in his tracks, turned to face him.

"You don't?" he asked.

"No."

"Do you know what race claimed telepathic contact among its priesthood, along with telekinesis and bilocation?"

"No—I don't."

The rooks, disturbed by the first crunching steps on the gravel, swooped and cawed among the trees and a frog from the depths of a ditch croaked with a guttural guffaw. The professor turned on his heel and set off nimbly toward the first of the huts.

"The Tibetans," he threw back to the minister. "They drove a spike of wood into the brains of their initiates. Through the forehead. Once you knew how big a spike and where to put it, it was supposed to give them telepathic ability."

"And did it?"

"That is what I set out to discover. On rats at first. I experimented with pegs and rats. Two thousand of them. I put them through a series of carefully controlled experiments. Food hidden where one rat knew its location but the subject rat did not. And more of this nature. In the end I succeeded. I discovered the exact size of the peg and the point where to insert it through the skull. I progressed as far as the Tibetan Llamas had done a thousand years ago. I created a telepathic rat."

"And then?" Wannemaker was struggling to keep up with the hurrying figure. Annoyed at this unorthodox method of reporting and considerably concerned for the security aspect. A Russian agent, for all the scurrying figure knew, might be lurking with tape-recorder and short-wave transmitter behind every buckthorn bush.

"Then, naturally, I continued with relatively sized pegs on a number of higher animals, fishes and birds. I induced telepathic abilities in all my subjects. Finally I carried out the crucial test. On a primate. The gentleman we are about to visit. An adult male gorilla."

"But my dear professor—why a gorilla?"

Peter Sanderson unfastened the latch on a five-barred gate across a concrete path leading to a large, brick-built hut with flower beds un-

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der the barred windows and wisteria trailing around the door.

"You mean why not a chimp or a gibbon? I happened to have a gorilla for which I had no other use. A rather likeable animal. We call him Rastus."

The door to the hut was opened by a white-coated young man, also with a pipe in his mouth and a rose in his buttonhole.

"Come in," the professor invited. "I want you to see Rastus's rather remarkable accomplishments."

Wannemaker found himself in a narrow passage, facing a line of cages. In the first of these a heavily built gorilla was standing, holding on to the bars with both hands and, in a very disconcerting fashion, staring him in the eyes. Something about the face moved Wannemaker intensely. A sense of brutish, seemingly demonic power. The bloodshot whites of the deep-set, brooding eyes; the half-open mouth exposing strong, yellow teeth; the massive, overhanging, intelligent brows. There was something malignant in the steady and, to Wannemaker's mind, totally evil stare. Even as he blinked, uncertain and incredulous, Rastus tugged suddenly at the bars and jumped back against the wall with a sharp cry of revulsion.

"It's all right," Sanderson said sharply. "He can't get his arms through the bars. Come along to

Ballantine Books

SPEAKING of being a Very Big Corporation—we were, last month—(speaking of it, that is), there are lots of traps in becoming a large corporate structure. Immobility is one. There seems to be a direct correlation between number of people and the ability to move. We are trying to offset this by doing our publishing in separate pockets, as it were—hence Beagle, Walden, Comstock and the new London operation. Ballantine Books' far-flung Empire. All of which make it possible for the original BB's to nip off to places like San Francisco for a couple of days or to get Annie over here for a week (well, hell, how else would we have gotten the galleys of DRAGONQUEST read in time?) and for others to visit us from various points of our small globe. In this way we hope to evade yet another problem of bigness—lack of communication.

•

AS TO what happens within our offices of (now) 2½ floors, it's a bloody mad house. We conducted a small poll recently and found that not one of the 90-odd bodies now located here would want it any other way. Working in this firm does something to people. As an example of our esprit-de-corps (if that is, indeed, what it can be called) the entire Accounting De-

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partment is flowering forth in beards. Formidable. A lot of us even read our own books—outside of the editors, that is. (This is a rare thing in a publishing house.) This department must sadly admit to not being able to keep up with the whole list any more. Just the Adult Fantasy, Science Fiction, Mysteries, Westerns, Ecology, Environment, Comstock and sex books. Enough.

•

HAVING thus brought you adroitly to the discussion of books, what have we got for this month—a whole fleet of books from Fred Pohl and Jack Williamson, namely: UNDERSEA QUEST, UNDERSEA FLEET, and UNDERSEA CITY—three to do with subsea academy types (did you see that crazy Cousteau film on the sea-dragons of Galapagos?) involved in various adventures, plus another group of Clark Ashton Smith stories —HYPERBOREA—our Adult Fantasy. Meanwhile all the H.P. Lovecraft titles in Ballantine and Beagle go bouncing from glory to glory. Great stuff.

MORE about dragons next month, and meantime, GET OFF THE TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN!

Sincerely . . . BB

the next cage. Now—as you will notice—Rastus can't see or hear us in here. There's a thick wall and a close-fitting connecting door between us. Here, take a banana and hide it in one of those cupboards."

The professor, Wannemaker noted, was a man different in his laboratory from the easy-going savant in the house. He was quick-spoken, keyed-up, exact in all he did. Wannemaker noticed the cupboards, numbered one to twenty-four against the far wall. Opening one, he put the banana inside, closing and locking the door and, at Sanderson's direction, hiding the key under some straw on the floor.

"All right," Sanderson said. "Come outside and watch Rastus carefully."

He closed and secured the cage door behind them. Then both he and the young assistant heaved on a rope running over a pulley to the connecting door until it was fully open. Rastus stood still, his hands on the cage bars, watching the door rise until it was secured and the rope tied. Then Wannemaker was conscious of the blood-red eyes on his face, unblinking, unwavering and, he was convinced, charged with an indescribable malevolent hatred. The lips pulled back in a grin—a snarl it may have been—and the beast turned, shambled through the door, picked up the key from under the straw, un-

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locked the correct cupboard, took out the banana, peeled it and, squatting on his haunches, popped it into his mouth. His eyes were still on Wannemaker as he sucked his fingers, nibbling reflectively at the nails.

"He read your mind," Sanderson said simply. "Or mine—or Roger's here—or the minds of all three of us together. It's not words, of course, that tell him where to go. It is the visual sense we all have before we verbalize that transfers itself. The gestalt, one might say. But we haven't finished. Roger, give him the bag of tricks."

ROGER took down a canvas bag from a hook on the wall and passed it through a one-way flap set in the bars of the cage. He produced a second banana and laid it in the passageway a few feet from the grille.

"Now then—we'll let you conduct the next operation yourself. Inside that bag are a dozen or so rods. Any three of them will screw together to make a scoop nearly but not quite long enough for Rastus to reach his banana. They're all numbered—one to fifteen, to be exact. Now take a piece of paper and write down any three numbers you would like Rastus to use and let him do the rest. Until you give him the idea he won't even be able to open the bag."

Rastus was looking at him again as he took out his notebook and pencil. He knew it was foolish to assume that the grin of any simian had the same origin as a human's desire to laugh, but there was, he was convinced, something more than anthropomorphism in his own conviction that Rastus was smirking at him with a sardonic and vindictive contempt. Even before he finished writing Rastus had lurched away to the bag, opened it and, taking out the correct three rods, had begun clumsily but without hesitation screwing them together.

"Remarkable—" Wannemaker breathed.

"Wait," The professor whispered. "You haven't seen anything yet."

Rastus inserted the rod between the bars and reached toward the banana, which remained another eighteen inches beyond his grasp. For a moment he seemed frustrated and uneasy. His eyes strayed toward Wannemaker's but he obviously found no comfort there. He shook his head several times and scratched his forehead with his free hand. Then he laid down the rod and stood for a while, grasping the bars, his head bent forward and his eyes closed. The banana began to move. A flick at a time, a quiver, a short bounce and then, rocking and slewing like a Mexican jumping bean, it began

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to move toward the cage. In a half-minute it was within reach of the rod, was hooked and maneuvered back to a point where the long fingers could reach out, secure it and draw it inside to be peeled and eaten.

The professor nodded, well pleased.

"Three factors emerge from this experiment," he explained. "Each in its own way remarkable. First—there is a sense of number, which was also hinted at in the cupboard experiment. All the rods would have fitted together had you been aware of it and made an instrument long enough for the purpose. But you did not know that and he was at that time taking his instructions from you alone. Roger and I kept our own minds inoperative by mentally counting from fifteen upward. But far more important than the sense of number was the ability to recognize numerals, a totally different matter. He could not, of course, relate the symbol for eight with any specific quantity but he received the image and identified its counterpart on the rod, together with the other two numerals you gave him. Children do much the same thing when, incorrectly, they are taught their tables before they have had time to develop a sense of plurality. Thirdly, and totally unrelated to the phenomenon of image reception, he has demonstrated the fact of telekinesis. The paraphysical powers latent in any brain are at this creature's command once he learns how to use them."

II

THEY were back in the comfortable lounge of the Tudor house, drinking tea and munching dry pastry the professor referred to as "biscuits" before Sanderson would discuss the matter further or answer the question that was uppermost in Wannemaker's mind. Night was deepening over the willows and Wannemaker had already settled himself to stay the night in an unheated and overventilated bedroom when the professor suddenly set down his teacup and produced a bottle of scotch. As he uncorked the bottle he returned without further preamble to the subject of his report.

"You want to know why, having progressed so far, I do not intend to go any further?" He handed his guest a glass and raised his own, staring at it thoughtfully for a while before he drank.

"There is an overall philosophical concept I shall try to explain to you later. A matter, shall we say, of the use of knowledge and the relationship of man to his destiny. The tiny, three-dimensional world of man and all his cousins is the tip

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only of a larger, paraterrestrial iceberg. But all this can wait. Let us consider Rastus himself. You have seen the ability this poor creature has developed as the result of a crude experiment: to read your thoughts and to utilize a power, the source of which no one, myself included, can explain. And Rastus is learning fast. Already we have taken elaborate precautions to ensure his safety. It is not bananas he wants most in life. It is freedom. The key to the door of his cell."

"But surely, he can't—" Wannemaker began.

"You have seen what Rastus can receive. You have not seen, nor do we know, what he can project. Telepathy is a two-way communication and its field, as far as we know, is not limited by distance. Hence your general's interest in its application in space. Not only can Rastus read your mind, he can also transmit his thoughts to you. We are not at all sure what form these thoughts may take since they cannot, of course, be formulated in words or even, possibly, in readily understandable concepts. But I am not at all sure that it was not Rastus himself who decided that you would stay the night with me. It was an out-of-character decision on your part and he seems, Mr. Wannemaker, to have taken a strong dislike to you."

Wannemaker wriggled uncomfortably in his chair. It was too deep and too low and he was a man much given to the right postures. He had not followed everything the professor had intended to convey but Rastus's dislike of him had seemed patent enough. He was not at all sure that Sanderson was not ranging himself on the side of his monkey.

"True, I sensed a certain malevolence every time he looked at me. But surely it's ridiculous to suggest— Why, I decided quite freely myself to accept your—ah—excellent hospitality."

Sanderson refilled the glasses and drew the curtains against the darkening night. A clock chimed from the hallway.

"Malevolence is not the word," he said. "No, no. Neither Rastus nor any beast can be malevolent, in the way you mean. He can project only the images of his own subjective life. Brutish to you, no doubt. Probably more brutish still due to his unnatural life in a cage far from the society of his fellows and the forests of his home. He has not so far seen fit to convey his images to me."

"But you know that he could. You believed he had done so to me."

"I have a colleague, Mr. Wannemaker. A young lady. She is an excellent zoologist, a quiet, pale, rather withdrawn girl not given to emotional upsets. She is now at

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home under sedation very near to a serious mental breakdown. Rastus desired her, Mr. Wannemaker. He has no mate of his own and no means, one would think, of formulating, let alone projecting, his confused desires. Yet he desires her. This confused projection of longing burgeoned the first time he saw her after the insertion of our peg in his brain. He continues to desire her from a quite considerable distance. Her house is ten miles away, but I am afraid that Dr. Angela Styles is never without Rastus in her mind or without an awareness of his presence. He will remain with her until he dies. Even after he dies, I am not sure—"

"You don't say!"

Wannemaker stared at him. The lighting in the small room with its ridiculously low, beamed ceiling was far from adequate. Two small standard lamps with incongruously large and only vaguely translucent shades. The atmosphere was eerie. The quiet, unemotional voice of the professor, the creaking of the uneven floor, a spasmodic thudding, due possibly to a tree branch stirred by the night wind and striking against the wall of the house. Still more eerie in the uneasy silences when nothing happened at all. It seemed not impossible in this otherworldly house to sense the thought patterns of Rastus like radio waves streaming in, permeating the half-light, curling with the smoke patterns from the professor's pipe, eddying in fragile images, trailing off into the air, but remaining afterward, a dead static conception of presence like the stale smell of tobacco after the pipe has gone out.

"I do say," the professor puffed, in answer to his question.

"But," Wannemaker objected, pulling himself together with an effort. "If that is so and your gorilla can project something toward the lady, something evil—"

"Not evil," Sanderson interrupted sharply. "He is projecting no more than a natural response, not even, as far as we know, any suggestion of actual mating. Do you think Rastus believes this to be evil? Evil implies departure from an accepted standard."

"Very well—not evil, but shall we say—unfortunate? If you are now satisfied that the same operation is possible on a human being, what is the further objection to doing it? If Rastus is destroyed and the project is carried to its logical conclusion the juxtaposition of the bestial to the human mind would no longer apply."

"You still don't see." Sanderson sighed. "Don't you realize at all what it is I have established? That we have now, all of us, to start our basic thinking again from scratch? That the whole scientific

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world will now have to rethink from its basic theories the whole application of knowledge itself? We must begin from a new and this time quite indisputable axiom."

"And that is?"

"MY DEAR Wannemaker, for an ex-Harwell man, you are remarkably unreceptive. What I have established is the simple fact that neither the human brain, nor, it seems, any brain at all, has evolved. There is no evolution. We were created."

"But how can you possibly deduce—"

"Very simply, my dear Minister. If the brain has evolved, it has done so by trial, error, experiment and mutation, developing new skills to overcome the problems with which each succeeding species was faced. It would have learned, step by step, to manipulate its environment. It did not learn to develop a paraphysical ability until I drove a wedge into its tissues and upset the normal workings of its highly complex, but still basically material, composition. I released something apparently new—a force. But this force was there already. I did not create it. I have unsheathed a link, it seems—a link inherently beyond the organic—to the submarine section of the human iceberg. This force did not evolve, but was inherent and must thus, without question, have been created."

"You mean—by God?"

"God is a simplification embracing, as the word does, in one concept a hoped-for explanation of all we don't understand. I would go no further than an intuitive guess. This paraphysical force is a link between the brain and the brain behind the brain. The mind, if you like—the real person, the real gorilla, the real rat, of which the manishness, the apishness, the rattishness is all we can see or understand. It would seem further that all parapersonalities—men, apes, rats, possibly all living things—are linked by an overall mind conception and what we term preverbal thought can flow through all and perhaps is, in some way in totality, common to all."

"What a stupendous thought," Wannemaker began. "But I still don't see—"

He was interrupted by the clangor of a telephone bell in an ancient black instrument on the carved oak sideboard. The professor lifted the receiver and listened impassively for a moment.

"Right," he said in reply to someone. "Get everyone here. I'll notify the police, of course." He replaced the receiver and looked long and sadly at the minister.

"You don't see?" he asked, returned to the original conversation. "I think you will see very

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shortly. Rastus has escaped."

They heard the story from the young man, Rogers, as he drove them— Sanderson, Wannemaker, a police sergeant and two constables—at high speed down a remarkably ill-surfaced road that led to a rambling and isolated house where the lady zoologist, Angela Styles, lived alone, attended now, the professor explained, by a nurse and two men from the labs. The armed attendant, whose job it was to keep an eye on the cage and report any suspicious behavior on the part of the occupant had gotten up, laid down his rifle, unlocked the door and let Rastus out, without afterward having any idea of why he had done so.

"You see what we're up against?" The professor sighed as they turned into a long, tree-lined drive. "The same thing could happen to any of us. We just don't know what we might do or exactly what Rastus can make us do. He can't verbalize. He can have only a vague notion of the world outside the lab. He cannot make us do anything outside the compass of his own understanding, but he can certainly be moved by a desire to prevent his own recapture."

"My men have instructions to shoot at sight," the sergeant grunted. "Nothing your ape can do will stop that."

"I regret the necessity, but it is the only way. I regret it for the sake of Rastus, for the sake of learning, for all our sakes. Most of all I regret the ancient law of all creation that we must kill what we do not understand. But law it is. Society must be protected. If we do not kill Rastus, Rastus may kill us."

"We'll take care of society," the sergeant confirmed. "We have every available man out tonight. He won't get far."

"You think he will make straight for Miss—ah—Doctor Styles?"

"I think it more than probable. If only because it is the only location he is aware of."

ANGELA STYLES was a pale, fair-haired girl with thin sharp features and small, deep-set but exceptionally bright blue eyes. She came into the library where they had been ushered by the nurse, a large room with bookshelves from floor to ceiling and high mullioned windows looking out onto the black shapes of ancient trees against the brightness of the moonlit sky.

"Won't you sit down?" she said. She had, Wannemaker noticed, a nervous, reedy voice, but she seemed at the same time, although taut and very upright in her close-fitting housecoat, reasonably well composed.

"So Rastus has escaped?"

"I'm afraid so," Sanderson confessed.

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She sat in a high-backed chair, her hands folded in her lap and studied them all from sharp, darting eyes. There was a long and embarrassed silence before she spoke again.

"You think he will come here, Professor?"

"It is a possibility we can hardly overlook."

"Now, there's nothing to worry about," the police sergeant assured her. "We've got a dozen armed men in the grounds and the professor thinks we all should stay the night with you, so you'll be properly looked after. We will have the dogs out after him in the morning as soon as it's daylight and a squadron of autogyros from HQ. He won't get far, I promise you."

"And when you find him what will you do—shoot him?"

"If you've got a better suggestion, miss—"

She was staring at the professor, accusingly Wannemaker thought, but he met her eyes squarely and shook his head.

"What else, Doctor Styles?"

"I see," she said sharply. She got up and straightened the folds of her housecoat. Her eyes flickered again around the room, resting for some time and to his embarrassment on Wannemaker. She seemed, he thought, like a trapped bird with the cage door open, unsure if she knew how to fly.

"Very well. As I seem to be adequately protected, I shall go to bed. Miss Rawlins here will see that you are all comfortable. I suggest, Professor, that you take the room next to mine. I should like to know where you are in case of necessity."

The professor stood for a long time at the window of his bedroom, looking out at the stars and the depth of the blue-black sky and the infinity and eternity that was beyond the sky. Tall trees on a clustered knoll moved only occasionally in the wind and a single long streak of a stratus cloud reached out from the world's edge across the horizon like the hand of God shading his otherworldly eyes to see what was on the dark side of his personally favored ball of rock, floating on the outskirts of his otherwise happily inanimate galactic garden.

I've made Rastus more and less than a man, he said to himself. *Knowing nothing of his brain or the mind behind it, I have split the wall and let the mind come oozing through. I have broken into the garden of all the angels, not because I had found the key to the door, but suddenly, like a thief with a jimmy. I am no better than a Mongol at the gates of Samarkhand.*

I should like to pray, he thought. Not because God and all his angels were really there in the garden or

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could hear him, if they were. But because he now knew that something or someone was there. Because of the iceberg below the tip. Because of himself and the knowledge now of someone behind himself, the counterpart that Rastus had found linking him with all the other Rastus's in some great shadow-casting sphere beyond the umbral and penumbral illusion of a subjective earth. He let himself down on thin and shaking knees by the bedside and considered what he should say and to whom he should say it. They were all there somewhere, from Lilith to the Mother of God. Lahamu and Tiamet. Buddha, Ghengis Khan, Jesus of Nazareth and Isaac Newton. One for the master and one for the maid and one for the little boy who lived down the lane. What should he say and whom should he choose? Why did reverence demand genuflexion rather than a leap into the everlasting arms, a wave and a whistle and a: "Hiya, God!" Why words at all? Why images? Thou shalt make thyself no graven image in thy mind, squatting Buddhalike on the battlements of a dream. Thou shalt not bandy words with God. But thou shalt do something rather than kneel on rheumy knees and let thy thoughts dance nimbly, heel for heel and toe for toe, across the coverlet.

Neither words nor images formulated into anything God might want to hear as he knelt by the bedside, hands cupped, staring at the wall. There was nothing to say, to project across the Great Divide into a listening, attentive ear. Nothing that the Divided Great could understand. An old man's wheezing whisper. A wedge driven into the skull and tissue of a near-human brain. The expediency of a gorilla's death.

III

THERE was a sound from the next room and his thoughts returned sharply from their unrewarding amble into wordless reverie. A window had opened with a stiff, scraping sound. A creaking of loose floorboards, a shuffling, a cough and then an unmistakable grunt. He pulled himself to his feet as fast as his stiff knees would allow. He felt no fear for himself but he was trembling nevertheless, almost paralyzed by the horrible realization that, loud as the sounds had been, Angela Styles had not cried out. Rastus was there—in Angela Styles' room—and she was completely in his power. He dragged himself tottering along the passage and threw himself against the doctor's door, expecting to find it bolted against any entry. It opened easily and he found himself lurching into the room head-

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first and stumbling toward a black shape that was launching itself from the open window into the night. He staggered after it and looked out. There was a tree with thick foliage spreading to the eaves and a branch was swaying with a spasmodic jerky motion. A rustle of leaves and then all was still. Only then did he turn to the bed. Angela Styles was leaning back against the pillows, smiling and apparently unharmed.

"You didn't call for me!"

"No," she said quietly.

"You're not hurt? He didn't touch you?"

"No. He didn't touch me."

She laughed a short rasping laugh and he turned quickly towards the door.

"No!" she ordered sharply.

"But my dear Doctor—"

"Call me Angela."

"Why—yes—of course, Angela. But we can't just let him run loose. No one can predict what he might do."

"Do you mind if I call you Peter?"

"Why, no," he agreed, puzzled. "Call me what you like."

"That's better," she said enigmatically. "You and me, Peter, we can't hand our work over to the barbarians. Let Rastus have his chance."

"I know what you mean. But we can't, Doctor—Angela. Whatever we say, we are a part of society."

"So is Rastus," she said.

He came and sat in the chair by her bed and looked at her thoughtfully. Leaning over, he took her pulse.

"It's all right," she smiled. "I'm not under his influence, if that's what you are thinking—not in any hypnotic way at least. I just don't want anyone to harm him."

"You may not know whether you are under his influence or not. How did he get in? Through the window?"

"Originally," she said in a tired voice. "But he was here all along. When you came. He can travel very fast, you see. He was hiding under my bed."

"What!"

"You needn't be alarmed. I said he was quite harmless. I was afraid of him only when I didn't understand what he wanted. When he came to me I knew. He was frightened and very lonely. All he wanted was to be near and tell me how lonely he was—when he found out how to do it. I understand him, you see."

The professor sat staring out through the window, helplessly, into the night. Torches were flashing under the trees and a dog was barking at the end of the garden.

"My God," he said, vocalizing the initial capital. "What have we done?"

"I can see you believe me, Professor."

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"Yes," he said, wearily. "I believe you."

"We must get him back safely to the lab and remove the wedge."

"It's no use," he told her. "The damage is done. Removed or not, it will make no difference."

"So this creature has to wander Earth, conscious for the first time of his own identity, aware of his loneliness, unable to use the knowledge we have thrust upon him, until he dies."

"Until he dies," he said.

"Why doesn't he hate us?" she asked. "He isn't capable of hate, somehow. Is hate only a human trait? We haven't made him human, we've raised him to a level we all should have known was there, though we never found it. We are the brutes, the guilty ones. And now, because we are afraid of what we've done, we're going to kill him."

THE torches were coming back toward the house and the first flush of morning was brushing its way lightly, orchid-tinting the edges of the broadening stratus cloud. He stood up and went slowly to the door.

"Yes," he said. "We've called out all the forces of law and order. Even the minister is here. Nothing I say will make any difference now; I am a part of that world down there, however much I believed myself not to be. We have the law on our side, whatever we do. And right. And the Common Weal. But justice? Justice is another matter. If we have let in anything through the pin-prick in that animal's brain, we may find that there is universal justice on the other side. And if there is, God help us all."

He went down to the library where the minister was sitting, dozing in a leather-upholstered chair. The sergeant and the three constables were playing gin rummy on a mahogany table, their rifles ready at their sides. He stood at the door, hesitating and uncertain of what to say.

"No sign of him yet, Professor. The dog-handler thought he had something just now but it came to nothing. Move through the trees, he would, I reckon."

"Sergeant," he said. "I want you to call your men off for a while. I want to go out myself alone and try to make contact with him."

"Bit risky that, sir, isn't it?"

"No!" Wannemaker sat up and dusted his lapels. "I can't allow that for a moment, Professor. You are far too valuable to society—to your country—to put yourself unnecessarily at risk."

"I am?" he asked.

"You must see that yourself. This animal is of no further use to us. You have developed the technique. It must be clear to you that, loose, he could do untold damage

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not only to you but to anyone else who crossed his path. Unpleasant as it is for all of us, he must be shot at sight."

"I don't take orders, Mr. Wannemaker. In this case, which I understand much better than you do, I give them. I would ask you, Sergeant, to kindly call your men in here."

"Sergeant—I am the Minister for Defense and in this case I can speak equally well for the Home Office. You will see to it, please, that Professor Sanderson does not leave this house."

He had forgotten what it was like to feel anger, so that he at first misjudged his own emotions. This was not anger that he felt, a testy, petulant resentment of a lesser man's authority. Anger was heat, confusion, spite and bile. In the heart of the minister, tall and commanding, his trousers creased and crumpled a little at the knees, the stolid-faced policemen lining up at the door, was only a cold, withering contempt. He decided that the contempt had always been there, deep inside himself. Contempt for his masters, the little men of power who bought knowledge and exploited it for their own trivial ends. What he felt, he told himself, was scorn and a hopelessness—a crystal-clear recognition of the doom of a world where the potentials of learning were siphoned from easy-going savants by tribal headmen wielding the fruits of wisdom with the same indifferent abandon as a Neanderthaler using a club.

"You will please step aside, Sergeant. I am going out."

"Now, you'd better be sensible, sir. There's nothing you can do out there."

Society treating him amiably, like a child. A foolish old man who thought himself capable of using his own wisdom without a policeman to show him how. He was really angry now. He would have brushed the sergeant aside or at least put him in the embarrassing position of using violence to restrain him. He would have done so, but he could not. He was frozen where he stood, one hand outstretched and the other caught in the act of hitching up his trouser band to a more comfortable position above the hips. The constables appeared equally rigid. They had suddenly lifted their rifles, an odd enough action in any case since they were not likely to shoot him, but had then found themselves immobilized in ungainly postures, staring blankly not at him, but through and beyond him. Sanderson found himself, although unable to step forward or backward, free to turn and face the window. And not only free but under a compulsion to do so. Wannemaker was standing like a toy guardsman by his chair

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and behind him, the large, mullioned window was slowly opening, creaking on its hinges. There was nothing beyond the window but the green-blue tint of the morning sky and the outline of the trees. Sanderson heard the door open behind him he knew that Angela was there, standing beside him.

"Rastus is coming," she said.

HE COULD not reply. There was a dryness in his throat and a cold vacuum in his bowels like the yearning loneliness of a silent, empty night. A dog howled in the distance. A nightingale voiced a single staccato trilling and snapped silent again a quaver short of the phrase. A horse in the middle distances whinnied.

Something was breathing heavily outside the window. Deep, guttural rasping sounds of strong lungs crying for air. A strangled cry. A swirl and rustle of inrushing wind and then a crash as the window was lifted and fell from its hinges and, a moment later, Rastus was standing on the ledge. He raised himself up and down on his huge legs and then crouched forward, his hands on his knees, his teeth bared and gouts of foam dripping from his lips. He sat for a while on his haunches, his mouth working and his deep-set red eyes resting on each of them in turn. Then he jumped to the floor and shambled to Angela Styles.

He's come to take her, Sanderson thought. *And nothing we can do will stop him. There is nothing any of us can do . . .*

But Rastus did not take Angela Styles. He stood in front of her, the muscles in his great shoulders knotted, his head sunk forward on his chest, staring, it seemed, at her feet. Whatever he was saying or trying to say, the image of himself he projected moved her so much that she touched him lightly on the cheek before sinking into a chair and bursting into tears. He stood where he was for a long minute before raising his hand and stroking the spot where her fingers had rested. Then, thumping his chest, he let out a cry that ought to have been of rage or challenge, but with all his enemies at his mercy, he made no move to attack. Instead he backed to the window and, facing them, let out another cry. Something, Sanderson knew, was about to happen, some tragedy about to unfold. Something Wagnerian was in the atmosphere, the dominant figure of Rastus like Wotan himself, a sullen smouldering of doom in his eyes.

Wannemaker began to come to life. He found his arms and his legs free, free to back away from the menacing shape by the window, to dive for the door, tear at the

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handle, boots and knees against the panel, beside himself with fear. The door, immobile as the sergeant and the constables, refused to open.

"Shoot him!" he shouted. "Shoot him, you fools!"

Rastus stood where he was, his chest rising and falling and his breath rasping and steaming through his bared, yellow teeth. Sanderson could feel his presence more clearly now, some glimmering of a lowering mental force weighing on the air like the imminence of thunder on a sultry day. Angela Styles felt it, too, and seemed to recognize it for something more than a projection of loneliness, isolation and fear. She dropped her hands from her face as the gloom descended, a mushroom of mental agony of which Rastus was not the source but, in some extra-corporeal way, the stem and focal point. The cloud hovered above and around them and, like the mushroom fins, something of his positive essence radiated toward them. Sanderson felt the tingle of its passage, an emanation of thought encarnalized, but although it passed through him with the emotional stirring of particles in a magnetic field, he could not have defined it, nor interpreted in any visual or symbolic sense what it was Rastus felt or intended to convey. Angela however appeared to understand.

"No!" she cried. "Rastus! Don't do it!"

Wannemaker had given up tugging at the door and turned to face him. He seemed calmer now. Deliberately and without taking his eyes from the great ape's face he took a rifle from the nerveless hands of a constable.

"No!" Angela cried again, but she seemed unable to move from her chair. They were all fixed and rigid except Wannemaker and Rastus himself. Rastus stood very still, staring fixedly at Wannemaker until he fired. Then, closing his eyes, Rastus crumbled to the floor —dead.

"Straight through the heart," Sanderson said dully, knowing that it was so. "He chose you as his executioner, and guided your hand."

"There was nothing else I could do," Wannemaker muttered.

"No, there was nothing else you could do. You fired the shot, but we are all equal in the sight of the one great unfocused eye. There is only one human race."

"I don't know what you're talking about—what eye?"

"You know he is still there?" Angela said, kneeling by the body, its head in her hands. "Not Rastus himself, but the power we all felt. It's spilling through the eye we opened in his head. The third eye. Rastus would have let us go and put the guilt only on the one, but

(Please turn to Page 176)

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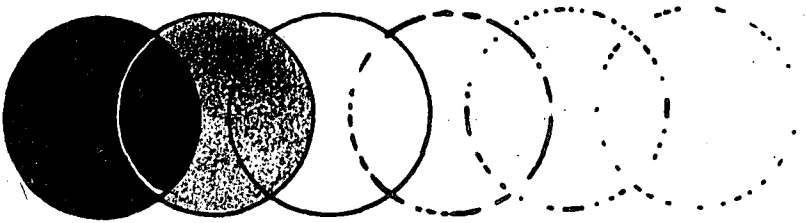

THE NO-WIND SPOTTED TIGER PLANET

Pollution was no problem. But where were all the people?

W. MacFARLANE

WITH the authority of experience, the Mohmu completed the interspecies transfer. He was projected from warm dark comfort into a bright noisy world of physical assault that made him take a breath into his new lungs and howl with shock. The displaced entity was lodged in his own body with full observation and no control, his ship was safely stationed a nanosecond in the past, and he was overwhelmed by sensory input. Any planetary investigator knows the best way to understand a species is to become one of them and this is what the Mohmu had done, a full identity transfer at the moment of birth.

The Mohmu are not chronocentric. Their physical being is essentially invulnerable. They raise their young in a mindless condition and their highest art is the design and imprint of intellect at bodily maturity. Programed as an investigator, with no imperatives of time, Brad Symons functioned in all departments, cried in the night and studied his new world.

He grew older with all deliberate speed and care. When his father rented a cabin with an unvented gas heater the baby pushed

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a coat stand through a window to save the family from asphyxiation. When his mother cut her wrist and fainted he lay on a pressure point until his father returned. Later, when he found the steering arm of the old Chevvy cracked and he was too young to warn about it, he tugged away the log in front of a wheel and let the car roll into a tree.

He was an extraordinarily ordinary child though he was Brad-now, Brad-aboard-the-ship and a Mohmu, constantly amazed at intelligence in such a tentative and fragile form, naked to circumstance and subject to improbable tensions. He adapted to the pattern of this image-manipulating species and began to project goals for orientation, to ignore reality and dream the future to construct the future. It was a profound exercise of will to live in distorted time instead of the eternal now.

His parents were caught by a storm on a lake and drowned, and the boy, who had been an average student, settled seriously to work and won a scholarship to college. He graduated as a cultural anthropologist. He took his masters at Columbia and his paper on *Ritual, Taboo and Sexual Practice Among the Academic Hierarchy* became an underground classic. It illustrated his complete familiarity with the odd juxtapositions men call humor and it made a lower profile professionally desirable. He took a teaching job at Euphemia College in Tullataska, Tennessee.

According to a small group of Young Turks on the faculty, Euphemia was an outstanding example of the stagnant educational system—motivational fade-out, instruction like a clogged leach line from the septic tank of knowledge. Brad Symons thought the college admirable, a field where young animals could exercise themselves and even more, a rich source for his investigation of what he privately labeled idiozniczroznies and coinkydinks. He had observed the hitherto unexampled foreshortening of time in man's history, but it was a coincidence (odds a million to one) that the idiosyncrasies of Joe Magworth (odds meaningless) should bear fruit at Euphemia.

Magworth said, "Okay, Brad, step into the field."

The other men, Beaird, Kramatz, Morgan and Dilwarden said they observed a euphoric effect, just as if the sun were shining on your liver, just as if you were eighteen and it was the first warm day of summer in a red convertible and the girl had that unmistakable languid look in her eyes.

The Mohmu were beyond primative technology. Experimental physics was plywood, C-clamps

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and pipe, electric cable and junction boxes, equipment of painstaking complexity. The discipline had its necessary jargon and while Brad understood words like *check, plug her in* and *goddamn,* most of the conversation was "thermal inertial diodes steady," and "in-phase beam triads" doing as they ought.

He walked into the circle painted on the floor. He was wearing a plastic doughnut on his head, a wide belt with rods sticking out a foot from his waist, a hundred strings of macaroni running from the doughnut to the rods and down to the floor. The tubes were filled with coca-cola or chopped alfalfa and at the focus of the beams, the man disappeared. Brad knew this because he had seen Dilwarden vanish. Kramatz swung a yardstick through him and Dilwarden said he felt it as much as a flashlight beam.

"Get the hell away," said Magworth. The men stewed and fretted and checked the machinery and swore. Beaird got a Polaroid and they tried it again, and Brad got a look at himself as others saw him. All the spaghetti had vanished and there he stood like a brick-red statue done up in heat-shrink plastic.

"Anthropologists are always great bastards," said Joe Magworth.

Brad told him that physicists were Tinker-toy clowns and his mother had been frightened by an Erector set.

MAGWORTH stumbled into Brad's apartment the following Sunday, heavy-eyed and inattentive to the TV football game. Brad was fascinated by football as a microcosm of mankind with infinite variables in a framework and Magworth liked the ballet and beer aspects of the game. Today he was preoccupied.

"I don't understand it," he said.

"The pulling guard missed his block, that's what."

"No—damn it, Brad! I got J.B. Buckert to come in and he's a bigger man than you. He's a very conscientious guy and wanted to know why the lights were on at three this morning. He weighs two-forty and he vanished like that little beaker of beer you gave me."

"Have another beer."

"Right," said Magworth. "But you're a polka-dot tiger, dammit. Every other person checks out stripes. Trouble is, I'm not a geologist—maybe you've a different kind of rocks in your head—and I can't find the money to pay for a first-class examination. All the college clinic can do is tell me if you have athlete's foot or not."

Three months later money was no problem. Euphemia was suddenly a peer of the University of

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Tennessee instead of a shirt-tail relation, because of Magworth, the Magworth Effect and what happened at the demonstration.

J.B. Buckert was chief of the eight-man police force of Tullataska, dedicated to his job as peace officer. He was a graduate of Euphemia and often bent the law fo favor the student, and when outsiders chose the college as a symbol of social repression and laid plans to raise hell, J.B. had early word on the proposal and took action. He kept a slush fund for worthy purposes and he financed a more particular application of the Magworth Effect.

What happened was called the Incident at Tullataska Creek. It flowed through campus and subsequently became as well known as the Rubicon. The invasion was organized. The wire services had been notified, a TV crew from Nashville was in attendance and sympathizers showed up from places all over the map. The local students came to watch the sophisticated ways of the outer world and were caught up in the excitement.

Buckert timed his operation to the musical interludes. People flung themselves around and, with the ecological addicts present, it was not surprising when many of them embraced trees. The loudspeakers blasted at ninety-five decibels and few noticed the tree fanciers. The TV crew paid attention and their sequence of one earnest young leader presumably overcome by frenzy, wrapping both arms around a blue gum, was picked up by the networks. The lens zoomed in to see handcuffs miraculously appear around his wrists and that was the tipoff. With the leaders embracing trees, it wasn't much of a demonstration. All it did was change the course of history.

J.B. said, "No harm done. We turned over the gasoline and dynamite to the state police. We're lookin' for the fellas who poured molasses in the electric git-tars. Handcuffs around trees? Students funnin' is what I say. The fella who used the sheepshears on them people is also missin'. The crowd dispersed nice when the music stopped. No trouble a-tall."

Anthropologists keep journals as teenage girls keep dance programs. Brad Symons wrote: "Of course it couldn't stay a secret. One reporter found the modified heating suits in the police lockers—Buckert sent a cruiser to Nashville to buy them at a surplus store. Then the *Newsweek* legman caught Dilwarden and Beaird up a tree, removing the beam projectors. What cinched it was the freshman who covered the happening with a Jap job and calmly sold an eight-by-ten glossy to UP-INS, the one with the

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shears in mid-air, chopping off long curls."

MAGWORTH said, "Hide me. I locked myself in the bathroom, climbed out the window onto the shed roof, sneaked through the lilacs and got away. There were reporters and TV and guys from GM and Westinghouse and when I got over the back fence I heard sirens in front."

"Have a beer. Relax. It's about time for the TV special."

Magworth groaned and chuggalugged half a quart of beer.

A girl on TV said there was no excuse to smell like yourself when you could smell otherwise and Magworth chuggalugged the rest of the bottle. The screen went blank and then: *The Invisible Man.*

"Turn it off!" said Magworth. "What am I going to do?"

"Keep your cool and make out like a bandit. The Army and FBI and CIA will come around. You could try for a warm weather foundation like Dr. Salk. Sell out to the best bidder. One thing, can you detect the Magworth Effect?"

"Oh, sure, with a diopiter ingaussing perpelator. Buy one at any radio supply store."

"Write that down for me, Joe."

"Okay, and a simple indopitor degaussing violator nullifies it. Turn it on or off. That's how we externalized the cuffs. Shall I write that down, too?"

"Please do," said Brad Symons.

He spent the evening in the Department of Anthropology after the CIA won the treasure hunt and took Magworth under its wing. He mimeographed the information and addressed the folded-over sheets to the mayors of the thirty-eight largest cities as reported by the World Almanac, to every fourth company on *Fortune's* 500 list and the rest to members of the House. As an anthropologist he deplored interfering with his study group, but as a Mohmu he thought he should balance things off.

Within six months the generation and nullification of the Magworth Effect were well understood. Brad Symons stayed in the center of the action because he was the one being on whom there was no effect. He had taken the precaution of mailing his flyers in a dozen little towns in another state and, after the publicity, complete disclosure was the policy of the government and he was the more or less official historian.

His report titled *Fear, Hysteria and the Zigzag Future* was a runaway best seller. This meant that a tenth of the population ever heard of it, a tenth of that number saw a copy and a tenth of those opened the book. He had the iconoclastic gall to reprint the headlines:

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LAW AND ORDER RAMPANT!
"IMPOSSIBLE!" J. EDGAR HOOVER
TOTAL INVASION OF PRIVACY!
MAGGIE WIGGY SAYS FUZZ!
NATIONAL EMERGENCY
DECLARED!

They invalidated the cliche that it takes 80% as much information to predict the future as it does to achieve it; 99% was available and no one foresaw the world as it was to become.

Brad relegated Magworth's latest thoughts to Appendix I:

> Assuming that present technology depends on past research, then the incremental increase of technology may be expressed as
>
> $$dS = TSdt$$
>
> where S = the present level of knowledge
> T = the rate of increase of technology
> dt = the temporal increment
>
> This simple first order differential equation may be solved with the result:
>
> $$\frac{dS}{S} = Tdt$$
> $$S = Ae^{Tt}$$
>
> Now if H = S, then:
>
> $$^{oc}tech = \int_{O}^{L} (Ae^{Tt} - Ae^{Tt_o})dt$$
>
> but if $t_o = 0$ and the constant A is assumed to be equal to unity, then:
>
> $$^{oc}tech = \int_{O}^{L} (e^{Tt} - 1)dt$$

And it got worse for thirty solid pages.

While Senators cried panic and Tullataska doubled briefly in population from an influx of industrial and international spies and invisible men were blamed for everything from spilled milk to earthquakes, the electronics industry stamped out millions and millions of detectors and neutralizers. At first they were very much like dog whistles with no dog to call. The United States exported millions for distribution in other countries. With the magnificent human ability to forget the past, the Magworth Effect distressed almost no one by the end of the first year, though the handwriting was on the wall, the beam broadcaster had been made portable and the receptors were third generation as two-inch-wide belts.

WHEN Brad Symons wore one he still looked like a shiny brick statue. Applications of the maggie effect proliferated while

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fundamental understanding was still at the chalk-and-blackboard stage, a situation like running north from the south rim of the Grand Canyon blindfolded, because extrapolation projected more level desert. The Mohmu was thinking about this at the entrance of the Institute when Joe Magworth parked his car. Forty-six people got out.

"How do you like that?" asked Joe.

"That rips the rag off the bush," said Brad. "I can barely understand the idea that we're built of atoms miles apart like the solar system, so how many angels can you jam together on the point of a pin?"

"We figure two hundred thousand in the same square foot space would push the two hundred thousand and first a foot away. No problem."

"Are you still individual, discrete and alone with a hundred and ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine people inside you and around you?"

"I'll agree it sounds cozy," said Magworth, "but nobody casts a shadow. Just like in the beginning, the sun still shines on your liver. A very happy feeling."

"I think today you bombed the transportation industry."

"That's the way the cookie crumbles," said Magworth with true scientific detachment.

Where ten planes had flown before, one flew now and it was very small. Commuter trains became the size of a delivery van. Cabs had nullifiers and so did every building, but elevators used the beam and little elevator space was needed. In the beginning, for all the fail-safes and backup systems, moderate disasters occurred. Nobody enjoyed the idea of sixty-three people materializing in one elevator and personal battery-powered beams worn in hats became popular for a while. With design improvements, a jet crashed after it sucked in a flock of Canadian geese over Fargo, North Dakota and four hundred and thirty-eight people walked away from the scene of the accident.

To the surprise of all observers, stodgy Washington, D.C. took the next step and installed beam projectors covering the entire city. You could see people in shops and restaurants and hear the bee-murmur of the great buildings, but the sidewalks were deserted. Visitors were issued receptors. Criminals were sentenced to visibility. With mandatory nullifier implants, they were the only ones who walked the streets. A timing device was set to the length of the sentence, coded to avoid tampering, and it worked well. Ostracism is a powerful force among social animals. Some cities took the

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opposite stance and mounted nullifiers in a spirit of independence, but they changed their position as the crime rate soared.

It was much like the process of electrification. Central station power generation was begun in 1882 and fifty years later there were still communities with oil or gas illumination. With the foreshortening of events, the almost total spread of the maggie effect took five years in the United States.

Brad Symons returned to Washington after four months in a holdout commune in New Mexico. He had studied visible towns as they went maggie and established the obvious: the sense of euphoria was so attractive it became habit-forming, as life itself is habit-forming in spite of multitudinous drawbacks like toothache and taxes.

THE Mohmu designed for investigation are remarkably stable, but with complete feedback from Brad-aboard-the-ship, Brad-now was hungry for the most human environment, the city. He thought the wide open spaces and mindless nature were great for freaks and this made the changes in Washington doubly shocking.

Truck traffic had dwindled. Private cars were almost absent. A few government vehicles were left. The nullifiers were off at the Institute and Magworth's office was empty. "Where is everybody!" Brad yelled.

"Hey, Brad." Magworth appeared in corporeality.

"What happened?"

"I see what you mean. Well, it's just better, is all. Solid bodies are great but they've got to be fed and they catch cold and you have to take them to doctors. I think the field theory has got to include the idea that man gets what he wants. Now, I've done a little math on this—"

"Another time, Joe."

"He dreamed of flying and he flew. Dreaming of music for private occasions, he made a record player. Dreaming of the moon, he made a ladder long enough. You see what I mean?"

"No."

"Well, scratch an engineer and you find a man who knocks on wood. Wary of a hubris of the intellect, mankind is now wallowing in a passion of the spirit. Delightful. It's been indicated by magic and superstition and religion. Forget the mechanism that triggered the reaction, forget the intellectual origin, forget Euphemia and Tullataska Creek."

"What are you talking about? Where does it end?"

"It's one of the things so obvious it's unexamined, but it's characteristic as hunger or fear

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of falling. Mary Coleridge put part of it like this:

Egypt's might is tumbled down
Down a-down the deeps of thought;
Greece is fallen and Troy town,
Glorious Rome hath lost her crown,
Venice's pride is nought.

But the dreams their children dreamed
Fleeting, unsubstantial, vain,
Shadowy as the shadows seemed,
Airy nothing, as they deemed,
These remain.

"You weird people are down the tube," said the Mohmu.

"There's an inbuilt wish for transcendental emotional experience. That's the way the buzzard burps. That's the way it is, Brad."

"Turn off the projectors!"

"They're only necessary during the learning period, like training wheels on a bike. Right now it's the midpoint of the process and they're still on while the rest of the people come to the same conclusion."

The Mohmu saw no point to continuing. "I've changed," he said. "Have a receptor handy?"

He put it on.

Brad Symons vanished. As far as the Mohmu could tell, safe and warm aboard the ship in his own body, living a nanosecond in the past had not been perceptible to the former Brad-aboard-the-ship.

Joe Magworth whistled. "Great. Another inbuilt is the belief that the mysteries are unending. You're an example. Wonderful. I'll have to think more about that."

He vanished.

The Mohmu considered another life on Earth. The planet was large and only the carnal, crass, materialistic cultures, the technically advanced countries, had gone maggie.

It was another of the multiple paradoxes. He felt a new sensation of sand under his own Mohmu hide, a dreadful itch toward chronocentricity, toward the unending, mysterious human experience. It was an abominable sensation.

He left horrible Earth for home in desperate search for help—renewed certainty—and faith in the massive accumulation of data. But first he put up a warning sign for unwary passersby in space, the first his invulnerable, ubiquituous race had ever bothered about:

TRANSITIONAL SPECIES MAY BE HARMFUL TO THE HEALTH

and he shut out the fear that he might be contaminated beyond curing, that his Earthly insights might be infectious to his own eternal gyroscopic genus. ★

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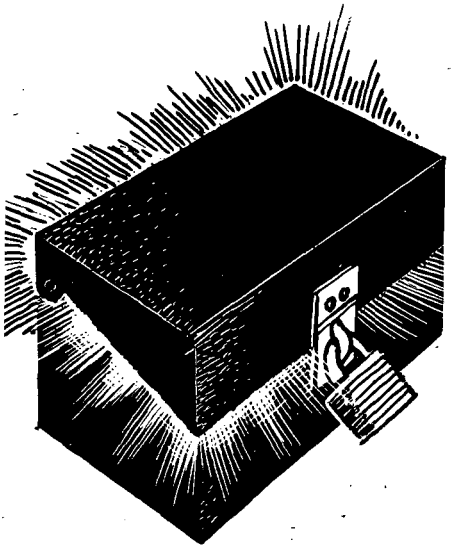

THEODORE STURGEON

THE VERITY FILE

Yesterday's truths are dying—and today's feel none too good!

CONFIDENTIAL:
AUTHORIZED EYES ONLY

ETHICOLOSSUS INC.
Office of the Director of Research
Interoffice Memo

To: Albert Verity, M.D.
Assistant to the Director

An examination of requisitions on file indicates the use of equipment and materials not readily explained by the nature of projects under development in your laboratory. I am, of course, quite certain that these requisitions are justified, but a word of explanation would be appreciated. Should you wish more specific information as to which requisitions are referred to, I shall supply it.
Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.,
Director of Research

cc: Samuel Rebate, M.D.
President

P.S. by hand. *Prexy's boy Uriah Legree (did you know he always calls our president Prexy?) has been snooping, hence the copy to the Old Man. Sorry. But what the hell* are *you doing with a hard-vacuum still? I'll try to cover for you but you cover for me—for not keeping an eye on you.*

G. Q.-P.

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ETHICOLOSSUS, INC.
Interoffice Memo

SEALED: PERSONAL

To: Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.

Damn it, Geoff, of all times for you to be away at The Ethical Drug Convention! All I can do is write this informally and hope that when you get back you'll come straight down here and let me show you the biggest breakthrough in the history of the company. Company, hell—the biggest thing since the scalpel was invented. Hang tight, boss. Fend off Prexy and his snooper for a little while longer while I get it written up and he'll forgive you—and therefore me—everything.

Just to whet your curiosity, though, let me tell you that my latest requisition is for more mice, lot A64 and L073. In case it's slipped your mind what these are, the first is Malignancies, inherited, and the second is Carcinoma, induced. The previous three lots of each group are cured—remitted—normal. I mean 100%, Geoff—and I mean overnight, every time. And the seven litters I have so far from the first lot—and one from the second, check out normal.

I know as well as anybody does how careful everyone has to be and how much time and cross-checking we have to go through, but I'm telling you—this stuff is a one-shot, overnight cure not only for lesions but for systemic metastasization. You don't believe this as you read it and I don't expect you to, so get down here and I'll show you.

And by the way—before you get to polishing up a medal for me—this isn't my discovery. All I'm doing is repeating the procedures of the guy who did discover it and I'm going to see to it that he gets the credit for it. My results-of-record extend back three months. His go back four years. So hurry back and get your thing down here.

Al

P.S. It also cures warts.

P.P.S. The discoverer is Max Orloff. He's a neighbor and a friend of mine.

P.P.P.S. On second thought, I'll enclose photocopies of my results. Did I mention what the raw materials cost? Nothing.

P.P.P.P.S. If I sound a little manic—wouldn't you?

A.V.

Last and ultimate and blockbusting P.S. because *I'll* bust wide open if I don't tell somebody, even if I put my life in your hands. Aunt Molly gave a party last Saturday and cooked one of her legendary feasts—for thirty people. She spent the whole day before—

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and most of the night—cooking. And the day before that shopping.

A.V.

ETHICOLOSSUS, INC.
Interoffice Memo

To: Albert Verity, M.D.
Assistant to the Director

Just a word to acknowledge your efforts during my visit to your laboratory. You will of course assign my lack of response to a deeply ingrained caution—the caution so necessary to all of us in the ethical drug trade. Above all the stature and reputation of the firm must be maintained and I am sure you will observe the same kind of caution. As I predicted, the requisitions in question are quite justified. Hereafter, however, it would be appreciated if you would report any new directions in research to this office before the fact. Keep up the good work.

Goeffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.
Director of Research.

cc: Samuel Rebate, M.D.
President.

P.S. by hand. *You recognize this as a slap on the wrist, very light because of the results. For God's sake don't talk about this on the outside—it could start riots. Matter of fact, don't talk about it on the inside either. As for your Aunt Mollie—I almost fainted. That I don't want talked about again—even to me. You took a terrible chance there and I for one am going to forget it. Sometimes you scare me, Al. A good thing I can be trusted.*

G.

ETHICOLOSSUS, INC.
Office of the President

CONFIDENTIAL

To: Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.
Director of Research.

I very much appreciate your sending me your interoffice correspondence with Dr. Verity. It was no more than your duty. I suggest to you—knowing it is hardly necessary—just what you suggested to Dr. Verity. We'd best keep this in the family. I am certainly going to keep it to myself. By the way—I fail to comprehend the reference to "Aunt Mollie." Can you elucidate?

Endorsement: I totally agree with you, Dr. Rebate, that the Verity file falls into my province as Director of Security.

In response to your request for suggestions, I think that first of all, Dr. Verity must be isolated—without his knowing it. I would suggest a security examination of his laboratory and papers each

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night after hours—and that the mailroom be alerted so that his correspondence interoffice and outside (God forbid) can be examined. His telephone can easily be put on delay—as is done on radio talk-shows—and monitored so that before an incautious word gets out of the building it can be cut. I think that to stop his work or to divert it would only alert him. Meanwhile I think an outside investigation of this Orloff person (that name has a bad ring to it, Doctor) is indicated, together with the nature of his relationship with Dr. Verity.

Who is Aunt Mollie?

Howlan Beagle, Col., (Ret.)
Director of Security

Endorsement: The one thing that strikes me is Dr. Verity's statement that the raw material costs nothing. Can you get me a non-technical description of this "nothing"? I don't believe it, of course, unless it's a figure of speech. But it worries me. Makes it too easy for the competition to undersell us once they analyze the product.

Tip Turner
Director of Sales

Endorsement: I appreciate a look at this file. I wouldn't say that at this stage the matter is in my department, but unless we are extremely cautious it might well be—and a nightmare to boot. I, too, very much doubt that this Orloff has anything—or Dr. Verity either—but the matter should be investigated. I will be glad to go with whoever investigates this person. He may require some handling. Let me know.

Genteel Flack
Director of
Public relations.

ETHICOLOSSUS, INC.
Interoffice Memo

To: Albert Verity, M.D.

Can you give me a brief description of the process you used to produce the serum you used on those mice? You know the one I mean. Never mind the technicalities.

Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.
Director of Research.

P.S. by hand. *Seal your response.*
G. Q.-P.

Interoffice Memo.

To: Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.
Director of Research

Sure. You start with the spore of *Mucor Mucedo.* What you want is the endospore, but you don't have to excavate for it. Just let it develop the germ tube and nip it off before it branches. Stick

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these in your bell jar or whatever you're using for a quick hard vacuum and freeze-dry it. You'll get an aqueous vapor that can be bubbled through distilled water until it saturates. Run it into your still. What comes out of the top pipe you can throw away. Same with the bottom. The one in the middle is what you call the serum, though I wouldn't—it's an aromatic extract. Does that answer your question?

A.V.

Interoffice Memo

To: The President

Here is Turner's question—which mightily impressed me; that man knows his trade—and Dr. Verity's answer. For our Sales Manager's information (not yours, of course) *Mucor Mucedo* is the common black mold, found in soil practically everywhere. The endospore is just what the word says—the inner white substance of the spore. The germ tubes grow out of the spore, which cracks open its black rind to let it out. Precisely what happens in that sort of distillation I can't say without an analytical series.

It is, as Turner suggested, rather alarmingly simple and inexpensive. Shall I suggest to Dr. Verity that he try to synthesize it?

Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.
Director of Research

ETHICOLOSSUS, INC.
Office of the President
Interoffice Memo

To: Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.
Director of Research
Good thinking!

Samuel Rebate, M.D.
President

Interoffice Memo

To: Geoffrey Quest-Profitte
Director of Research
Good thinking!

Tip Turner
Director of Sales

Interoffice Memo

SEALED: PERSONAL

Geoff, what in God's name is wrong with the people upstairs? Synthesize it? Sure I can synthesize it. It'll take twenty-two steps and thousands of dollars worth of equipment and time—and who knows if the final distillate will do the same thing? Okay, okay—I'll get to it (though better not let Prexy's boy find out about the requisitions it's going to take) because after all I only work here. But why on earth synthesize something that's so easy to come by already? Are we going to price life-saving right out of the market? Sometimes I fail to see the

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humor in the ethical drug business. Or the ethics either.

Don't mind me, Geoff. I'm just blowing off steam. You'll get your goddam synthesis. Thanks for the private shoulder.

Disgustedly,

Al

Endorsement: Hardly a loyal attitude, that.

Howlan Beagle, Colonel (Ret)
Director of Security.

From the desk of:
Uriah Legree
Assistant to the President

Picked up Mr. Flack at prearranged time, 8:00 A.M. Tuesday, driving personal car. Arrived vicinity Orloff residence shortly after 9:00. After considerable excursions up and down unfashionable streets without success, queried local gas station, asking for Max Orloff. Attendant, Grand Ol' Opry type, overalls, old straw hat even, cigar stub interfering with diction, said Balzac, Baldaz, Boldass or Bolaz?—difficult to tell which and not understandable until later. Mr. Flack said again, Max Orloff and the native said, Yeah, that's ol' Baldaz (or Balzac or some such) and gave explicit directions.

House on top of hill behind screen of trees—three, four acres cultivated, garden vegetables, grapes, cow, duckpond, rabbit hutch. Sign on door WE LIVE WITHOUT CLOTHES. IF THIS MAKES YOU UNCOMFORTABLE PLEASE RING AND WE WILL DRESS. IF NOT, PLEASE KNOCK. Reached for doorbell. Mr. Flack stopped me and knocked, said always take the sucker at his own measure.

Door open, man in his forties wearing hair to shoulders, beard period. Waved us in asking nothing. Big room, beams, fireplace, loom. Weaving at loom young woman wearing long yellow hair period. Smiled. Second young man comes in door at back, suppose kitchen, wearing full skirt long black hair period, says, Oh, hello, I'll get tea. Started to say no. Mr. Flack said, Thanks yes. Man said, That's Joyce, woman at loom, that's Jocelyn. Jocelyn ties off thread, comes to us, kisses Mr. Flack, kisses me just after I caught Mr. Flack's Hold Still signal. Mr. Flack introduces himself and me and says we're from Ethicolossus. The man acts very glad, says he's Max Orloff. Sit down. Nothing to sit on but great big half-filled bright-colored velvet bags. Mr. Flack sits on one, his weight makes it shape itself like a kind of chair without legs. I try one carefully, lose balance, fall into it, it catches me, sure enough a chair, much too low but

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comfortable. Orloff says, Jocelyn made them. Jocelyn sits on floor in front of, between us. Smiles a lot.

Mr. Flack tells Orloff how impressed everyone at Ethicolossus is with him and his work and a lot more about saving the world from misery and pain. Orloff takes it all in as if he believes every word and after a while I think he really does. Mr. Flack doing all talking, slow and easy, Jocelyn says to me Like to see the place? Mr. Flack flashes me a quick nod and Jocelyn gets up and holds out hand. Don't want hand, don't want to go, but Mr. Flack gives signal again and I get up. Jocelyn keeps hand. Very unsettling. Go out through kitchen, brick and iron stove, burning wood I guess. Beams, cast-iron and copper, tile floor. Big. See larder, root cellar, spring house, bedrooms with mattress covering whole floor, twenty cats with names, stories, four dogs, doves. Jocelyn tells how they live off the land, but only salt, flour, matches and the like, not even sugar, they keep bees. Orloff's lab. Like Alchemists workshop—lot of stuff usually glass is ceramic. Jocelyn says Joyce makes it.

On the way back in she stops and takes both my hands and says, Oh, please, will Ethicolossus buy Max's discovery? Said I don't know, but maybe. She says, Oh, and tears come into her eyes. Says it's been very hard for a long time. Max could lose the place. It would take such a little bit to let him keep it. Went back in. Joyce has tray with mugs. All go into big room. Mr. Flack and Orloff heads together over papers, Max has Mr. Flack's pen. Joyce says, Tea? I don't want it but Mr. Flack takes his and gives me the look. I take the big mug, guess Joyce made that, too, took a drink. Herbs. Awful. Mr. Flack drank his all up, so me too. Everybody happy enough to make a man puke. We leave, both girls kiss us, afraid Max Orloff might, too.

In car, Mr. Flack laughs all the way down the hill, says, You'd never believe what we got the process for—fifty dollars, a lousy fifty dollars. Only Orloff does not know that and will not until he shows those papers to a lawyer. Told him Orloff about to lose the place. Mr. Flack said, Good, glad we got there before he moved. Said this world is sharks and minnows and the minnows live to get eaten, that's what they are for.

Dropped off Mr. Flack at Ethicolossus, proceeded to county airport for second part of investigation. Lunched at airport, caught Flight 803 as planned, landed at Breed City 3:18 p.m. Hired car, proceeded to Mollie Verity neighborhood, checked out house. Trees on street made it like tun-

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nel, houses far apart, old-fashioned, gingerbread, porches, porticos, porte cocheres. Old but neat, paint bright. Shutters on most, wide lawns, picket fences, flowers. Verity house light gray with green shutters. Drive to corner, candy store. Call. Say I work with Dr. Verity, just passing through. Miss Verity sounds very hospitable. Drive back and park. Little lady bounces off porch glider, meets me halfway up front walk, takes both hands. Different thing from that Jocelyn altogether. Eyes bright as headlights, hair graying but not much and pulled back so tight it hurt into little bun. Apple cheeks really. Looked like all her own teeth. Gingham dress, blue with white polkadots and white collar and white tea apron, looked like that what's-his-name that used to paint *Post* covers. Rockwell. Harder to believe than naked Orloff.

Inside, not a word until lemonade in tall glass with ice and homemade ginger and lemon cookies. Then all about Albert, how is Albert, is he working too hard, does he look peak-ed? Never had to say I don't see Dr. Verity one month to the next. She carried it all.

Have to say if I didn't see this woman myself, couldn't believe both her and the medical report Col. Beagle gave me to read. Report said total terminal, metastasis, gone everywhere, weight less than 80 pounds, delirium to coma. Then spontaneous remission. But all that only months ago, now healthiest little lady around, full of bounce, laughing, always on the move. Said it herself—cancer did her good. Never had so much energy before, nor so much fun.

No trouble at all getting her to talk about it. About Al Verity either. Sun rises and sets on him. Golden boy. Not just family pride, real miracle worker, all that. Couldn't get her to say what if anything he'd done. She was too far gone to know.

But she said this, she said she came out of the haze and the pain laughing. She says she never felt so good in all her life, better even than now. She said she saw colors she had never seen before, had no names for them. Shifting, balanced patterns, moving mosaics. Everything part of the colors—sound—click of a spoon, footsteps, airplane—translated into the colors, joined them. Then, dreams—impossible flying and living and feeling dreams, realer than most real things. And all the while feeling great.

Then hungry. Couldn't get enough. Her folks and friends laughed, then got worried. Gained 18 pounds in three weeks, all of it in the right places, kept on feeling good, so not to worry.

Gave me a piece of fruitcake, says it's Albert's favorite, says that

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I should give it to him.

Somebody else better do that. At least till he finds out from someone else.

Like my job. Lot of different things to do all the time. Never had a worse morning, though, or a better afternoon. Maybe some day see that lady again.

Expense account attached.

Uriah Legree
Assistant to the President.

Endorsement: I attest to the accuracy of Legree's photographic eye and telegraphic prose. I cannot completely identify with his sketches of me, but then, why cavil? That is not the issue. What is most seriously the issue is that the treatment she had, however she got it or from whom, seems to be psychedelic or at least euphoric. That won't do.
Genteel Flack
Director, Public relations.

Endorsement: What is overridingly important—and I am astonished at the reluctance of both these gentlemen to point it out—is that this Orloff is a nudist with long hair who has an open and irregular arrangement with not one, but two females. I would advise strongly against any association with a person of this sort. One can readily assume what his politics is. There are more kinds of security, apparently, than these gentlemen realize.
Howlan Beagle, Col. (USA Ret)
Director of Security.

Endorsement: As the long-haired man would doubtless say, the Colonel can cool it. With those signed papers in hand there is no danger of any such association. Dr. Quest-Profitte: when you have read through this, see what you can do about getting the euphoric effect out of the distillate.
Samuel Rebate, M.D.
President.

Interoffice Memo

To: Albert Verity, M.D.

Al, I've been studying your diagrams of the aromatic rings in the Orloff distillate, as well as your chromatography charts, and it seems to me that there may possibly be a parallel or analogical similarity between some of these fractions and such compounds as psilocybin. If so, there may be unexpected and certainly unwanted side effects.

Will you please check this out for me?
Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.
Director of Research

Interoffice Memo

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To: Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.
Director of Research

I'm impressed. I really wouldn't have thought you or anyone could have discovered that analogue by the rough reports I sent up, though it is there if you know what to look for. The answer is yes—the stuff gives a tremendous high and I have the happiest mice in the world. If you're worried that people might buy it for that, like glue-sniffers, forget it—it seems to have no effect on anyone but cancer patients. It'll take a lot of testing to prove that out, but it seems to be the case—so much so that I was about to broach the subject of a line of research to investigate the distillate as a diagnostic.

Would you favor such an approach? I believe it would bear fruit—and, rather quickly, at that.

Work progresses on the synthesis, which I still think is a vast waste of time, but indications are that the synthetic product will work as well as the natural derivative.

By the way, I dropped over to see Orloff the other night and he was in seventh heaven. He showed me the agreements with Ethicolossus and I find them extremely generous. It's going to make a great deal of difference to a very good man.

Right?

Al

Interoffice Memo

To: Albert Verity M.D.

Al, you'll have to get the euphoric effect right out of the distillate. Dr. Rebate, Mr. Flack, Mr. Turner and I have conferred on the matter and it's unanimous. The thing to shoot for is an effect no more marked than that of the common tranquilizers or so-called psychic energizers. That much would be fine. Can you do it?

The answer to your question re using the Orloff distillate as a diagnostic is, of course, answered by the above.

Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.
Director of Research.

Dear Geoff:

I'm taking advantage of you, I know—and also of a certain symbolism. This is a letter on plain paper and in a plain envelope—for plain talk, for once not under the engraved umbrella of the Ethicolossus name and image. This is me—Al—the guy downstairs who shovels mouse turds and tries his damnedest to do what he wants in the way you say you want it.

Let me sidle into the subject. Years ago there was a wonderful English humorist, almost forgotten today, whose name was Jerome K. Jerome. He was a very funny man. He was also gentle, quizzical, questioning and bright

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as hell—one of those rare human beings who was capable of exploring the everyday world as if it were a foreign country, full of strange practices and heathen idols—which of course it was and is.

Remember one of his simplest, gentlest little essays. It was about baby dresses. In his day—around the turn of the century—it was customary to make dresses about four feet long for infants. He began to wonder about this, as he wondered about everything his eye lit on, so he went to an expert to find an answer. The expert was one of those legendary English nannies pushing a pram in a London park. "Why do babies wear such long dresses?" he asked her, and she replied, just this side of shock: "My goodness, sir! You wouldn't have them in *short* dresses, would you?"

Now the point of the essay isn't that she didn' know and was admitting it. The point is that she did know and that was her answer. Further, it was an answer that absolutely satisfied her, the kind of answer you find at the end of a theorem, or carved on a tablet of stone for Moses.

We've run head on into one just like that. You want me to take the "upper" effect out of what I'll be so incautious as to call a cancer cure. I understand what you're doing. You're protecting Ethicolossus against charges which might be brought against it once the news was out. I'll concede that they *will* be made when it gets out. But it seems not to have occurred to you that the charges can be refuted—and should be.

First of all there's a safety factor. I think it will be proved beyond doubt that that euphoric effect will not occur except in the presence of malignancy. But absolutely aside from that—did it ever occur to you to ask, "What's the matter with sick people feeling good?"

Why is it that morphine is the mainstay in terminal analgesis? You know as well as I do that there are a dozen or a score other drugs which will kill pain as well or better, which are not used simply and solely because they are euphorics. It isn't a medical issue, it's a moral one—and it's the kind of morality that has no place in medicine—not the kind Hippocrates was talking about, nor my kind either. It's the kind of morality that forced the Chinese doctor to examine his female patients by means of an ivory doll passed through the curtains, marked where it hurt. It's the kind that made anatomical dissection virtually impossible for over a thousand years.

We don't give euphorics to dying patients because somehow it's wrong for them to go out feeling good. We do a little something to

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keep them from feeling too bad or from feeling at all—but somehow it's immoral to let them go out happy.

In the case of Orloff's distillate we have to think one step further. Suddenly I see the whole R & D of this amazing substance aborted because patients might feel good—not while they're dying, but while they're getting well!

I'd hate to have to explain that to a man from Mars.

Hey, Geoff—I'm really grateful that I have your shoulder to cry on in private like this. I get frustrated from time to time and this helps.

Al.

ETHICOLOSSUS, INC.
Interoffice Memo
SEALED; PERSONAL

To: Albert Verity, M.D.
Assistant to the Director

There is very little I can say in response to your good letter, except that I share in your pleasure in this means of making yourself feel better. It seems to me that the proper place and time for investigations into the philosophy and morality of the healing arts is at two in the morning after too much weak beer in one's second year of medical school. These things can hardly be the concern of men of our degree of age and experience, especially not on company time.

I will go so far as to point out to you that our function in pharmaceuticals is to serve medical practice, not to alter it. Let physicians make these alterations. When and if they do, we shall accommodate them. We can do no more. We must do no more, Dr. Verity.

I do not think your letter was what, in law, is called a responsive answer to my query as to the possibility of recompounding the Orloff distillate in such wise as to reduce or eliminate the deleterious side effects. Please advise me.

And, of course, continue to feel free to express yourself to me in any way you see fit. It pleases me to have this function.

Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.
Director of Research.

Interoffice Memo

To: Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.
Director of Research.

Please refer to the ring diagrams and chromatograph charts on which you recently commented and from which you so expertly deduced the parallelism of the distillate with certain psychomimetics. These diagrams and charts present a far less subtle statement of the impossibility of making the alteration you suggest. It is anal-

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gous to asking a metallurgist to substitute lead for tungsten as a hardening alloy. No matter what the derivation—natural or synthetic—Orloff's distillate will not work without that structure. It is not I who makes this statement, Doctor, but biochemistry.
Albert Verity, M.D.
Assistant to the Director.

Endorsement: You smacked him too hard, Geoff. Once he begins to doubt the source of your information about the euphoric effect, he will begin to doubt a great many other things. Better call him off the project before he does.
Samuel Rebate, M.D.
President.

Endorsement: Some people just don't know how to handle people. Q.—P-Doll should have cleared it with me.
Genteel Flack
Director, Public Relations.

Endorsement: If anyone bothered to ask my advice, I'd have said a long time back, kick him out altogether. Not a good teammate at all. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.
Howlan Beagle, Col. USA (Ret.)
Director of Security

Endorsement: The man gives me the creeps. I have this nightmare about our marketing the Orloff thing and it doesn't work. I have this other nightmare about our marketing it and it does work. And I don't know which is worse. I don't want to say any more than that and don't need to.
Tip Turner
Director of Sales

Endorsement Don't care what happens. All I know is I got to eat his Aunt Mollie's fruitcake. Great.
Uriah Legree
Assistant to the President.

Endorsement: Just leave him to me and don't tell me I can't handle my people.
Geoffrey Quest-Profitte
Director of Research.

ETHICOLOSSUS, INC.
Interoffice Memo

To: Albert Verity, M.D.
Assistant to the Director.

I concur in your conclusion that nothing can be done about the unfortunate side effects inherent in the Orloff distillate. We have

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therefore concluded that the project had best be shelved. Please collect all files and notes and have them delivered to me, complete and indexed, not later than noon tomorrow. I am making arrangements to have all unnecessary materials, specimens, test animals and equipment removed from your laboratory immediately. You may proceed with the previously authorized projects assigned to you.

Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.
Director of Research

Interoffice Memo

To: Geoffrey Quest-Profitte, M.D.
Director of Research

Why don't you square with yourself if not with me? The Orloff distillate will disappear into the archives (and now I understand why your terms with Max were so generous: they were all contingent on production; now for fifty lousy dollars you've gained all right and title to his discovery) and it is being buried

—because Max Orloff has no medical degree

—because he is a known eccentric

—because the distillate can be easily produced from readily available materials, duplication is likely and profit is small, or

—because a big markup couldn't be concealed

But mostly because the existence of such a treatment would send shudders through the Big Machine and all its many parts—Ethicolossus, the pharmacists, the doctors, the hospitals, the hospital-supply firms, the "chronic" rest-homes and all their heirs and assigns, cohorts and confederates.

And I quit.

I resign with great joy—not because I am defeated in this project, but because Orloff and his work and his way of life are bigger than anyone's business or career or prestige and I want no part of any of that. You will call me a dropout, but I will go ahead with the healing I was trained for—and with no more dirt on my hands than I get from weeding the eggplant patch. You'll never pin a malpractice on me because I am on to you. The papers Orloff signed are no good to you because Orloff exists and the distillate exists and I exist—and because of that people are just going to get better and they'll pay for it by harvesting tomatoes and chopping wood. And here's one more thing to think about. With Orloff—especially with me and Orloff—there's more where that came from; more products, processes, ideas.

But you don't want to hear any of this. You can't, can you?

Albert Verity, M.D. ★

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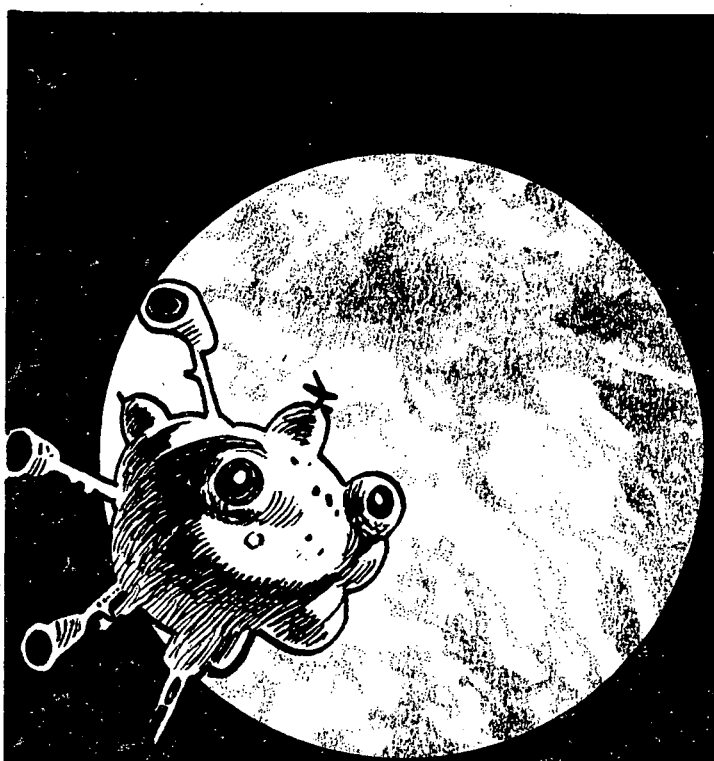

FALLING THROUGH THE WORLD

DUNCAN LUNAN

Up was down and down was up, but there was only one way to go!

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"HEY, MAC! Have you got a minute?"

McKay turned. Slazeck was coming out of the Communications Room.

"I was just starting to look for you," said Slazeck. "We've something coming in from space."

"A starship, you mean?"

"No, something physically coming from deep space. It's about the moon's distance out right now." They went back into Communications and Slazeck plugged into the perception circuits of the Interface equipment. McKay did the same through his personal communicator.

"There it is." Slazeck brought out the relevant head-up display. The circuits gave a direct input to the perception centers of the brain. "It's making no signals and it's quite small, whatever it is. But the scanners definitely think it's artificial."

"Do we have a visual sighting?"

The symbol display merged into the section of the heavens containing the intruder. The starfield grew richer as magnification increased but nothing else came into view.

"It really *is* small."

"Doesn't mean we can ignore it, unfortunately," said McKay. "Earth has some deadly companions orbiting the sun these days, despite the clean-up efforts of the Furtherance teams after the battle. In the good old days, the Sasarenn installations would have taken care of it," he added ironically.

"Innocent or guilty," Slazeck agreed. "But from its trajectory, this one is guilty. With stuff being thrown every way during the battle, some of it is bound to intersect Earth's orbit again."

"Right. Try a recognition pulse, anyway."

"No response," said Slazeck a few moments later. "It's a missile for my money, Mac."

"I think so. It'll be in range in twelve hours. We can put it on ice while we make certain."

"Always supposing it doesn't destruct when you put an Interface in front of it."

"That, too, is possible." McKay sighed. "We can shield Earth from the heat flash, but there would be a communications blackout." He came off the circuit, "returning" to the room with its curiously blank-faced equipment. "Okay, I'll call Lang and get the Committee for Earth's Defense alerted. I can just imagine how pleased they'll be."

He was becoming quite used to this juggling act between two alien technologies and the worried authorities of Earth. The Interface, a multiracial culture linked by interstellar matter-transmitters, had reached Earth some time before, immediately preceded by the war

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fleet of the reptilian Sasarenn, who opposed the spread of the Interface. The Sasarenn had occupied the Earth-moon system for three months, with McKay their reluctant planetary agent, before the Furtherance (the Interface survey fleet) broke through the blockade and pitched them out. That left Earth, somewhat shaken, newly enrolled in the Interface with McKay still planetary agent, still flying the Recovery and Liaison Vehicle thrust upon him by the Sasarenn. Dealings with the Interface to date had not simplified the situation in the least.

The Committee for Earth's Defense seldom made McKay's life easier. When he telephoned Lang at the U.N. he had some trouble making the situation clear.

Lang wanted to know, "Can't you send a camera missile to intercept before it gets nearer Earth?"

"The thing's just inside the moon's orbit," McKay said patiently, "making about three miles a second toward Earth. The maximum range of the Interface relay is ten thousand miles, as you know. We can throw a missile out from that with any speed you like, depending how far out you want the rendezvous, but the faster it goes the more accurate our aim has to be. Even if our aim is on target we'll only get a glimpse in passing, and by the time we've evaluated that glimpse and decided to destroy the thing, the missile will be well out of range."

"But if you wait we may get a thermonuclear explosion within ten thousand miles of Earth."

"Too early for that worry. As soon as it's in range I'll put an Interface in front of it. If it doesn't blow then, I'll bring it to rest and look it over. If it's dangerous I'll drop it through Interface into a disposal area."

"It had better work," said Lang. "If the Van Allen Belt is disrupted the international scientific community will go crazy—to say nothing of the military reaction!"

"I'm fed up to here with both of them," McKay replied sourly. "A member of the international scientific community managed to put the RLV on full combat alert yesterday, trying to map the power section interior with ultrasonics. I can't get them to believe the ship's conscious and suspicious of them."

"Okay, Mac, point taken. We'll leave it with you. Keep us posted on developments."

THERE were no developments until late that evening when the object fell into Interface range. McKay had considered taking the RLV up to the space station and handling the interception from there but had decided there was no

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point. With the perception circuits annihilating immediate surroundings, the crew missed nothing by the ship's remaining at the Montana spacefield. They had visual sighting of the stranger now, but it was still only a speck among the stars.

"Here goes, then." McKay had set the Interface relay to bring the object to rest where it was. "Up Interface—"

An intricate tracery of symbols filled the head-up display for a second and was replaced by one word: Negative.

"What the hell? Up Interface—"

The word swam in their heads again.

"What's going on?" Lang asked. He was plugged in on sound only, in New York.

"The object is inhibiting the space around itself from Interface contact," McKay told him, working furiously with the computer input. "I'm working back to find the limit of the interference."

"What could cause such interference? Is this object of non-Interface origin?"

"Perhaps it's an Interface relay itself," said McKay. "Several were lost in the battle, believed destroyed."

"The limit of the interference is eighty miles," he announced a minute later. "I'm sending out a camera probe now. Stand by—"

They waited eagerly for the probe to close the distance. "You watch the picture, Walt," McKay said at last. "I'll slow up the rocket."

Watching the electronic display, McKay turned the probe and prepared to match velocities.

"I have visual sighting," Slazeck reported. "Object roughly spherical, coming up fast— It *is* an Interface relay."

"Okay." McKay fired the probe's motor and brought it alongside. "Let me see—"

The relay was roughly spherical, built up of solid-state components in a complex pattern; but one side of it had become a glassy, fused mass.

"Sasarenn beam damage," he said. "Receivers knocked out, obviously—that explains why it was never recovered."

"That ends that panic," said Lang with obvious relief. "Are you going to blow it up now?"

"I don't think so," said McKay. "Where's it going to fall?"

"In the South Atlantic," Devlin, the third member of the team, reported. "Off Cape Horn, but well away from land."

"Well, then, no need to worry," said McKay. "Unless it burns out in the atmosphere we'll try to salvage it after splashdown."

"Can't you pick it up in space?" asked Lang, anxious again.

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"There isn't time for that. It'll be in the atmosphere in about twenty minutes."

"Your coolness amazes me," said Lang. "What if it burns up?"

"Then we can't recover it." Lang was being unusually dense today.

"Shouldn't it, therefore, be destroyed now?"

"No, dammit. We should recover it if we can, but it's not worth risking life for a snatch in space. There's no danger in letting it fall into the sea."

Lang's misgivings disappointed McKay. So far Earth's only dealings with Interface civilization had been a few RLV missions flown by McKay, Slazeck and Devlin on behalf of the Furtherance teams opening up this part of the Galactic spiral for Interface traffic. Lang and McKay were agreed that there must be more contact with the member races of the Interface, and recovering an Interface relay, worth a planet's ransom, would help this along. They waited while the relay fell on into the atmosphere; as McKay had hoped, the defensive field still operating acted as a heat shield and the unit decelerated steadily. As the ionization around it dispersed a radio beacon came on, calling for pickup.

"Let's go," said McKay. He had brought the RLV across to the control buildings and they were already suited up for the flight. The ship took off on VTOL jets, converting to forward thrust, then to ramjets as it pulled up to the Interface corridor Air Traffic had laid out, away from the field.

AT FIVE thousand feet McKay contacted the orbital relay, a unit identical to the one they were after, but positioned in stable orbit around the Earth. There were similar units for Mars, Jupiter and Venus now, and for other points of interest along the great staircase of stars the Furtherance had reached. Any of them could be reached in seconds, once the void had been crossed to position the relays—a task to which at least one member race had dedicated all its resources.

"Up Interface—" said McKay to the ship's computer-autopilot.

They were climbing into a night sky with a few stars showing through clouds lit by a first-quarter moon. In the south Atlantic it was nearly dawn, so the half-mile disk of the Interface was full of pale, cold clouds. The RLV flew into it and there was the sea below them, with Cape Horn out of sight two hundred miles to the west and a black circle of Montana sky hanging impossibly behind them. After a few seconds the disc vanished, leaving them alone.

McKay activated the RLV search devices. "That sea looks pretty rough," he said. "We won't

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be able to touch down, so the pick-up's going to be tricky."

"You said it," said Devlin. "I'll go aft and try to get it figured out."

McKay was sure he'd think of something. The RLV—Recovery and Liaison Vehicle—had been designed to make rescues and pick-ups in all extreme conditions. However, the search devices were having trouble. By now they should have been on top of the splash-down, but the ship hadn't detected the downed relay's position. The satellite overhead had lost it as well.

"I think I've got it figured," Devlin reported. "How near are we to the pickup?"

"Can't find the target at all," said McKay. "Stay back there. I'm starting a search pattern."

After an hour he gave up. If the relay had been transmitting anywhere in that area of sea they would have found it long before. And if the beacon had gone dead it would be pure chance even for the RLV's sensors to find it in that tumbling waste. Most likely it had hit too hard, damaged as it was, and gone straight to the bottom.

Four days later McKay was with the station commander at the Montana field when Slazeck phoned from Communications. "We've picked up that relay's beacon again."

"It's come back to life? Where is it now?"

"Two hundred fifty miles off the Cape of Good Hope."

"You mean Cape Horn—Good Hope's the tip of Africa."

"That's the one I mean. To be more accurate, it's off Cape St. Francis. That satellite is out in the Indian Ocean."

McKay swore. If Slazeck told you the world was coming to an end he still wouldn't make it sound serious. "Okay, get out to the ship on the double. We'll grab the thing before it moves again."

When he got to the ship Slazeck and Devlin were already aboard. Cathy, Devlin's fiancee, was waiting in the hangar.

"Can I come for the ride, Mac?"

"Sure, if you want to." As Lang's assistant, Cathy was a valued member of the RLV team. "There shouldn't be anything for you to do on this mission, though."

"There's nothing for me to do here today." They ducked under the fuselage and stepped on to the outer door/ramp of the RLV airlock. Once aboard, he showed her to a G-couch and went forward to the controls.

"One thing I don't understand, Mac," the girl said as the ship climbed away. "I thought it was theoretically impossible for a relay to project itself through Interface?"

"So I've always been told," said McKay. "So this one must be interfering in some way with the

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Earth-orbital relays. That's why we have to neutralize it at once."

"Where has it been for the last four days?"

"Who the hell knows?" McKay replied with a shiver. "A bigger hazard to navigation than a rogue Interface relay would be difficult to imagine."

ON THE Indian Ocean the day was beautiful. The Interface had appeared as a circle of flawless blue against the Montana thunderclouds and the relay, when they found it, was floating peacefully in a calm sea.

"We don't get to try your idea after all, Dev," said McKay as he made his approach. "You'll be able to reach out and pull the thing aboard." He set the ship down vertically, starting up the fans of the air-cushion pads and moving in on the floating satellite. "Opening lock now."

"I have a line on it," Devlin reported soon. "Bringing it in now. Open cargo hatch, please."

"Cargo hatch open."

"Second line attached—reel it in. Satellite coming aboard now. We'd better hurry this up, Mac, the weather doesn't look so good from out here."

"The weather? Good grief, you're right." A haze had come up from nowhere and was beginning to obscure the sun. As the scene grew darker the sea looked more threatening. "My God, that's a sudden change. Is the satellite stowed?"

"Clamps closing now."

"Okay, I'm closing the cargo hatch. Get back in and shut the lock."

"Ready for takeoff," Devlin reported a minute later. The motion of the ship in the waves was becoming noticeable.

"Okay, I'm taking her up." McKay started up the VTOL jets and eased the ship up from the water, correcting as the wind took hold. "This is going to be a real storm down here," he said as he converted to forward thrust.

"Came up out of nowhere, didn't it?"

The sun was gone now and the haze was thickening into clouds blowing over them with surprising speed.

"I don't know what this is, Mac," said Slazeck, "but I recommend we get above it."

"Gladly," said McKay. "But I can't gain more height."

"Systems check," ordered Slazeck. The computer display cascaded over the field of view. "We have green lights on all systems, Mac."

"We have full power on the jets and can't climb," said McKay. "If this gets any worse we can't even stay airborne."

"Look ahead, Mac!" yelled Cathy.

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A shallow depression had appeared in the sea ahead. In seconds it became a bowl and then a sheer pit, still expanding in size, until the far side was lost in the thickening mist.

"That's not a whirlpool, it's an Interface!" shouted Slazeck. "That water's going down vertically!"

"Into what, for God's sake?" cried McKay, still fighting to keep the ship up. "Can anybody see what's down there?"

"We're going over the edge—"

Cathy shrieked. She sounded terrified and who could blame her? The awe-inspiring sight was like the edge of doom and already the ship was below normal sea level.

"Our jets are powerless against this downdraft," McKay snapped as they went down with the thundering wall of white water. "Rocket acceleration warning, primary boost in five seconds." He banked sharply away from the cascade, stood the RLV on its tail and fired the fusion sustainer motor. A blinding jet of blue flame stabbed down into the abyss.

"I don't believe this," he murmured as the rocket-seconds ticked on and on. They had expended enough fuel to go far out into space and still the edge of the titanic waterfall was lost above them.

"Go to secondary boost, Mac, please," Cathy implored.

"We can't, honey," Devlin said soothingly. "If we use secondary boost down here we'll melt ourselves."

"Okay, cut-off," said McKay. The ship stalled instantly, almost crashing into the wall of water before he regained control.

"Let's keep that down," murmured Slazeck as they banked out from it again.

"Let's all calm down," said McKay. "The ship's fully functional and we're not about to hit anything. I want to hear some thinking about what's happened to us."

"First thought," said Devlin immediately. "Stop circling and fly along the face of this thing."

"Okay." McKay leveled out. "Basis?"

"It doesn't look like the curved side of a pit any more," said Devlin, "and we lost sight of the other side even before we fell in. If this is a flat sheet of water it must have edges."

"Radar shows nothing ahead," said McKay. "Incidentally there's no change in outside air pressure, though on visual evidence we've already fallen miles."

AFTER thirty minutes there was no sign of an edge to the waterfall, nor of a bottom to it.

"There's no way out," McKay heard Cathy whisper.

"Nonsense," he said sharply.

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"Interface has thrown us into some weird situations before this. We were a month in pitch darkness once, remember? We don't give up on this one so soon, when the ship's still in good shape."

"What do the search devices show so far, Mac?" Slazeck asked. As always he was calm.

"Search devices show nothing. According to inertial guidance we're flying in a straight line—but there's nothing ahead of us, behind, above, below, or opposite to the water. The artificial horizon says we're nose-up all the time, by the way, but if I level out we start gaining airspeed."

"It's like the old flat-Earth legend," said Devlin. "The sea falls off the edge."

"If I see giant elephants or turtles I'll let you know," McKay promised.

"Do the instruments give us any kind of position in relation to the Earth's surface?" asked Slazeck.

"Not a thing," said McKay, checking. "We're in limbo, it seems."

"I think you're right there," Slazeck agreed. "The fact that we can't fly upward suggests that we're not in normal space at all."

"Now we're getting somewhere. What kind of space are we in, though?"

"I think—on the evidence so far—it's finite but unbounded. Look, an Interface only lasts about half a minute. There's a limit to how much water can fall through it, however deep in the sea it was. And when we were above this thing it looked like a cylinder. The sides didn't look straight until we were inside."

"I see," McKay said slowly. "So this airspace is curved back on itself through a fourth spatial dimension. Though our eyes and our three-D inertial guidance say we're flying in a straight line, we're actually spiralling down a four-D cylinder."

"More complex than a cylinder," said Slazeck. "I can't visualize an analogous shape in three dimensions at all. Look, this wall of water seems to extend to infinity above and below us, and that's just as impossible as its lateral extension."

"Ow." McKay rubbed his forehead under the pressure helmet. "So it's closed in a fifth spatial dimension as well. There really is no bottom to it in our vertical."

"Right. There's nothing here but air and water, however, so we can't mark any point so as to recognize when we next passed."

"We could trail smoke, but it would probably disperse in all this water vapor before we went around the fourth- and fifth-D loops and came back to it."

"There's a point," said Devlin. "How come the waterfall's still

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there? With the accumulating kinetic energy of this endless drop you'd think it would all be vapor by now."

"There's lots of vapor around us. Visibility's a few hundred yards at most. Probably just as well for our sanity—if the fourth-D radius is only a couple of miles, say, we could see ghost images of ourselves!"

"But the falling water isn't accelerating now any more than we are," said Slazeck. "Each drop of water over there has reached its terminal velocity in air."

THEY all looked again at the raging white wall. "Staggering thought, isn't it?"

"Back to work," said McKay, tearing his eyes away from the hypnotic display of force. "How has this multidimensional phenomenon come into being? It's new in human experience."

"You may be wrong there," said Slazeck. "I'll tell you—what put the idea into my head was the starting point. Years ago I read a piece about five areas in the world where unusual numbers of ships and aircraft vanished without trace. They all lay in the oceans to the east of the continents—off North and South America, South Africa, Australia—and they were all the same oval shape and size. The thought occurred to me then, quite fancifully it seemed, that there might be some congruence—some overlapping of those areas in multidimensional space."

"So the thing's a natural phenomenon," said Cathy. "Was it the origin of the flat-Earth legends and the edge of the world, do you think?"

"Can't be. Nobody who saw it could survive until now. Even aircraft pulled in would run out of fuel eventually—and anything falling into that water would be smashed to pieces. We must be the first nuclear-powered machine in here."

"That's one big advantage we have anyway," said Devlin. "Since we're not burning fuel we can keep flying on jets forever."

"Oh, no," said Cathy. "Like an airborne Flying Dutchman. *Why this is Hell, nor am I out of it*—"

"No, no," said McKay gently. Cathy was still recovering from a bad time on the RLV's last mission, regaining her confidence. "The relay made it through, protected by its defensive field, in four days. All we have to do is keep flying and we'll get out eventually."

"It will take more than four days to fly through," Slazeck pointed out. "The water's falling a lot faster than we are."

"If we just dive, we'll pick up more speed until we reach the ship's thermal limit. We could hold the speed back, but I wouldn't

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care to fly on airbrakes for days on end."

"Agreed," said Slazeck with a professional shudder.

"Another point has occurred to me," McKay said after some moments. "We thought the relay had gotten to the Indian Ocean by interfering with the orbital units. But in fact it must interact with this natural spacewarp, getting into it and out again via Interface. From our viewpoint in the outside world, the fall through the warp took four days and we've been down here for more than an hour already. But there's still light here, which can only be coming from the open ends, one or both. And those ends, being Interfaces, are only open for thirty seconds of real time."

"I copy," said Slazeck reluctantly. "We're outside normal time as well as space. To us, the fall could take any amount of time—millions of years, maybe."

"Equally, it may be nearly over," McKay said hastily to keep Cathy from despair. "My thought was that the far end of this may be open to us right now if we can find the way to it."

"Suggest we begin with the Interface relay, since we seem to be agreed it got us into this," said Slazeck.

"Agreed. You take over, Walt, and Dev and I will take a look at this beast we've brought aboard."

THOUGH the artificial horizon still said the ship was nose up, the floor was flat underfoot. McKay and Devlin walked to the rear of the main cabin and opened a floor hatch into the cargo space. There lay the gray sphere of the relay, dry now and faintly stained with salt.

"I'm not sure we can risk fooling with this," said Devlin. "That molten damage goes pretty deep inside and we know nothing about its technical principles. Obviously parts of it are erratically active and who knows how sensitive it is."

"Sure," said McKay. "I wasn't thinking of tampering with it as much as possibly opening the lower hatch and dropping it. Maybe it's only the relay that's holding us inside the warp and we'd find ourselves back over the Indian Ocean."

"Or maybe a thousand miles under South Africa," Devlin replied. "We can't tell where we are right now, projected on normal space. Besides the relay then goes on in harmonic motion to and fro in the warp—and we still have to find it again and dispose of it. Let's hang on to it now we have it."

"Well said." They closed the hatch and stood up. "Of course we may be wrong to blame the satellite. Every time we bring this girl of yours we get into trouble."

"You're not putting her off," said Devlin. "Jonah or not!"

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Back at the controls, McKay plugged in and scanned the all-around visual display. Their situation was unchanged: they were still flying through a misty abyss, featureless except for the vertical tumult of water to port of the ship. "Where does the light come from?" he asked, after more thought. "Obviously not from the water; yet it's so diffused around us that we're casting no shadow on the water. Somewhere there's an Interface feeding that light in here—why can't we see it?"

"Obviously the inner structure of this warp is still more complicated," Slazeck commented. "We're moving along the periphery—and even that we can't conceive of except as a mathematical abstraction."

"It must have a center," said Cathy. "Maybe if we cut across that we can get out."

"It doesn't have to have a center—" McKay began.

"Yes it does. The outstanding characteristic of this space-within-space is its gravity field."

McKay thought for a moment. "It's not a true gravity field, Cathy, because it's impossible to overcome it. It's just an effect of the curvature of space here."

"All gravity is an effect of the curvature of space, if I remember Einstein," said Slazeck. "I think Cathy's right, Mac. A five-dimensional space doesn't have to allow free movement symmetrically in all of the dimensions, does it?"

"I haven't any idea," said McKay. "But if there *is* a normal gravity field in a new kind of space, it should have a neutral point somewhere."

"It's Earth-normal gravity," said Devlin. "I think it's just Earth's field channeled through this warp. There won't be a neutral point—but the way out must be right along the center of that channel."

"What brains we have!" said McKay. "Do you realize the ship's computer isn't equipped to test out these intuitive jumps with math?"

"I don't care," said Devlin. "The theory does seem intuitively correct. If we continue to fly around the fourth- and fifth-D curves of this space we'll ultimately reach and pass some kind of mid-point beyond which the warp leads back to normal space. The instruments will show we're diving involuntarily—and the water would fall upwards—if we could see it from here."

"All right, accepting that, I don't think we can short-cut the trip in that case. We can't navigate in four- and five-D."

"We don't have to," said Cathy suddenly. "We're moving along the fourth and fifth axes now, though we can't detect it—and along our first and third—and that's doing the trip the hard way. If there is a

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short-cut it lies along our lateral axis."

"Good girl," said McKay with the utmost respect. "Cathy, from now on you can come on any mission you want."

"What are you proposing to do?" asked Slazeck. "Fly out from the water?"

"Fly out from the water as far as we can go—sideways from here, not upward, Dev. When we hit the inner convolutions of this some weird things will happen, though. Does anyone think we should fly through the long way after all?"

"Frankly, no," said Devlin. "We have no way of calculating just how long that long way will be. It might literally take years."

"Okay," said McKay. "Everybody stay strapped in—we'll make a run for it." He banked away from the stupendous cascade, out into the mist. Now they were completely isolated. The gray light came from above, below and all sides. Only the instruments guided him—and as he watched, the inertial guidance reported a simultaneous 360-degree turn in all axes.

HE KEPT the controls centralized. "We just passed the first bend in the course," he said. "We've found a short-cut in one of this thing's dimensions, all right."

"There goes another one," said Slazeck. "Look out—"

McKay banked away from the curved wall of water looming out of the mist. "How did that happen?"

"The radius of the warp is diminishing as we go along it," snapped Slazeck, inspired. "It'll happen again. Keep turning away from the water."

McKay obeyed as the guidance toppled again and radar showed water ahead once more. Through the mist he caught a glimpse of it—this time the curvature was obvious.

"I think I've got it now," Slazeck went on. "This thing is analogous to a corkscrew in shape but five-dimensional—with us inside the screw. If we'd continued our original course we'd have flown all the way down the screw, spiraling inside it two ways as we went around and around the fourth- and fifth-D periphery. The 'walls' would have curved gradually as the screw shrank—but instead we're now cutting across the turns of the screw. As the radius narrows your straight course keeps taking you back to the side."

"We're approaching it at a lesser angle each time," said McKay, banking again.

"Right. When we pass the midpoint our course will seem parallel to the water, I believe."

"And then the screw will widen again?"

"I sure hope so."

"How narrow is it going to get?"

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Very narrow indeed, it became obvious as the inertial guidance toppled again and again. Now they could see the racing water all round them becoming a tunnel in the mist. McKay went on correcting course until they were flying straight along the center of the tunnel.

"Artificial horizon's level again," he reported. "Why aren't we gaining airspeed? Relative to the water we're diving vertically."

"Because we're on the central axis of the warp and near the midpoint. Gravity acts radially outward here, equally in all directions. The water out on the periphery is following gravity in directions one, three, four and five and we're flying down the weightless axis of two."

"That water, though it looks to our senses to be falling straight, is making an elaborate spiral relative to our course?"

"Right. We're still flying at right-angles to it, though you can't detect that any more."

"The spiral is still contracting, Walt. The periphery's moving in on us—"

"You can never get a submarine when you want one," said Cathy. She seemed to be coming to terms with the situation.

"I think we'll be okay," said Slazeck. "The gravity field is going to hold the water to the sides of the tube."

"That won't help us if the clear space is narrower than our wingspan!"

"I don't think that will happen. The narrowing seems to have stopped, in fact."

"So I see. But the guidance toppling is becoming continuous." McKay has now shut off the gyros but the laser unit was still operational. As he watched, the artificial horizon began to drift.

"How does that grab you, Walt? According to that we're starting to spin."

"I think," Slazeck said slowly, "that although the three-D radius of this tunnel has stopped shrinking, its radius of curvature in one of the extra dimensions is still diminishing."

"How serious is that going to be?"

"It shouldn't hurt us at all, even if it rolls up the ship like a cigarette. We won't be able to detect the change."

"I can detect a change," said Cathy. "The light's fading."

"It's being red-shifted," McKay discovered, wondering where his own panic level was. "This three-D tube is so tightly wrapped around itself now that visible light hasn't the energy to cross it!"

RADAR contact with the water failed. As they watched, the visual input to the ship's sensors dropped steadily into the infrared.

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"We're going to get that back on the radar frequency before long," said McKay. "Until we do we'll be on dead-reckoning. All I can do is keep the controls centralized and pray we don't drift off-center."

"An interesting question," said Slazeck. "How far can space be warped before its fabric gives way?"

"There must be some minimum radius of curvature below which matter disrupts," McKay agreed. "Since the relay made it through here, I assume we won't be wound up as tightly as that—"

Suddenly Devlin yelled.

"Dev! What's the matter?"

"Stay plugged in," Devlin said, very rapidly. "Don't anybody use his own vision. The ship's perceptions aren't affected by the radius contraction but ours are—horribly."

"Why?"

"The visual field the computer gives us is derived from structural relationships," said Slazeck. "Though space is curving unbelievably it's still showing the wings as straight. They'd still look straight to Dev's eyes if seeing didn't depend on light images—but the retina must catch multiple images of everything now."

"I'm still plugged in but I'm feeling dizzy," Cathy complained.

"You're right," said McKay. "We're building up inertial effects from the spinning space is doing around us. I'm closing the acceleration shields now."

"The ship is being left behind by the rotation of three-D space in the other two dimensions," said Slazeck.

"I'm not surprised," said McKay, fighting an insane desire to laugh. "According to the computer our wingtips are moving at near the speed of light!"

The energy blackout was creeping down the wings. "For the sake of sanity," McKay ordered, "stay on the instrument display. Even the computer can't make visual sense much longer."

"I wonder if there's a minimum radius for perception of any kind," said Slazeck gravely. "Will we twist so far that we can't even form *mental* images?"

"We must remain calm," said McKay. "Even if we get to complete sensory deprivation the ship is still here around us and unless we hit the side of the tube space will start to straighten out again."

"A ghost ship," said Cathy. "Not even a ghost, just an intellectual construct."

"Hang on to that construct," said McKay. "We can still think in the abstract even if we can't form mental pictures."

A LONG pause followed. There was no visual input at all from the ship's sensors now but the in-

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strument display remained effective. Nothing happened to talk about.

McKay thought, *If we touch that water, which in the "extra" dimensions must be too close to us to measure, we won't even feel the end at this speed. Perhaps we already have— "Why this is Hell, nor am I out of it . . ."*

"It's lifting a bit," Devlin reported. "We've got the fuselage back."

It was true. Though the image was very dim and the wings still faded into nothing, the computer was able to form the image of the hull again. Gradually the image brightened, grew wider, came back into the visible spectrum.

"We're through," said McKay. "From here it's downhill all the way."

"Visibly uphill, gravitationally down, like that crazy hillside in Scotland," said Slazeck. "You shouldn't have to worry about hitting the sides now—your straight course is still along the axis of the warp."

"Right," said McKay. The curved wall of death had receded from them on all sides and they were isolated in the mist again. As predicted, to maintain airspeed McKay now had to fly nose-down by the artificial horizon.

"When we reach the periphery we'll see it as a sheer waterfall again," he realized aloud. "It'll be dead ahead of us and I'll have to pull up fast."

"Down," said Slazeck. "Down for the love of God. If you pull up we'll stall and hit the water for sure."

"That's crazy! We're trying to fly up out of this thing, from the sea into the sky—"

"But gravity, as channeled through this space we're in, will be upside-down with respect to real space until we cross the Interface."

"That can't be right!" exclaimed McKay. "Surely gravity can't turn back on itself—"

"Think of it as falling through the world, Mac. We'll come back to the ocean's surface and we'll dive out into the sky, not climb. Take my word—look at the radar."

Before them, blocking their way as the mists parted, was the familiar, terrifying wall of water. It was, of course, falling "down" in relation to the ship, in relation to gravity and aerodynamic lift. But which way was that in relation to the Earth's surface? Surely the ship had to climb past the cascade and over the rim.

"Up," he said firmly.

"Down, Mac, believe me." Even this couldn't shake Slazeck.

McKay banked before they reached the wall, out into the mist again. He primed the rocket motor as they turned—and at the last mo-

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ment, visualizing how the breakout would look from outside, he had serious doubts. Water couldn't fall into the warp at *both* ends—the light was brightening around them as the sea parted somewhere to let them go.

"Down it is, Walt," he said and fired the fusion motor.

The instruments and everything else went crazy. What for a moment was a power dive became a vertical climb out of a pit in the ocean which was filling with appalling speed. The waters rushed together on the dazzling exhaust as the RLV leaped into the storm-filled sky.

Vision was lost for a moment as they tore through the clouds and came back with the full force of brilliant sunlight. The rocket ascent continued at maximum acceleration.

"Good grief," said Slazeck, making a navigational check. "The Pacific, this time."

"I won't begin to feel safe until we leave the atmosphere," said McKay. "Get me an escape trajectory, retrograde in the Ecliptic."

"What are you going to do, Mac?" Cathy asked.

"Since we can't get rid of this relay using Interface, I'm using the ship as a slingshot to launch it toward the sun. If we have enough fuel I'll give it a collision course. Then we can separate eighty miles from the thing and come back via Interface ourselves."

The sky darkened as they burned up through the stratosphere. "Secondary boost, five-second warning," said McKay.

"Well, I guess we're the first guys in history to fly through the Maelstrom," said Devlin, relaxing.

"It's easier that way," Cathy threw in. "Our hair hasn't turned white."

"It has on the inside," said McKay, watching the Earth retreat below. ★

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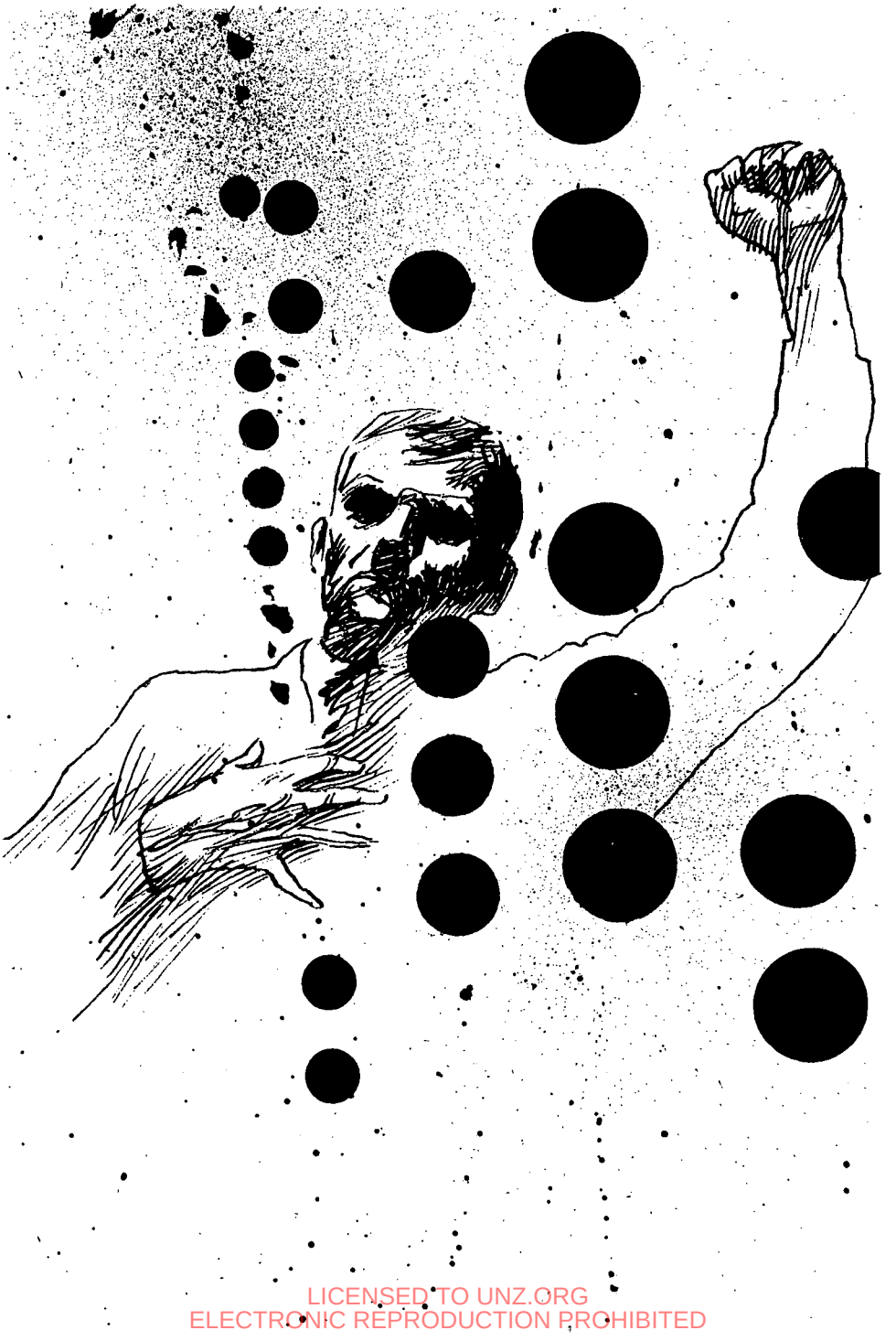

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JAMES E. GUNN

The Message was the same for all, yet each man read it his own way . . .

THE MESSAGE

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THE audience waited.

Every seat in the domed stadium was filled and the aisles were clogged with people sitting and standing. The people were of all kinds: old, middle-aged, young, children, infants; men and women; rich and poor; black, brown, red, yellow and pink; clothed for work, street or party. They waited for the Message to begin.

Missing from the audience were the criers, the coughers, the whisperers, the talkers, the catcallers, the whistlers, the feet stompers. And the minimal noises of more than one hundred thousand persons, the shuffling and shifting, were muffled by the distant thunder of air-conditioning units trying to cope with body heat and exhalations and a Texas summer.

The bodies were packed together, shoulder to shoulder, knee to back. The sensation was not unpleasant. It was, in fact, a kind of sensual communication, as if the fleshy contact formed a circuit linking each member of the audience to the rest like batteries in series. All were waiting for something to happen, waiting for some switch to be thrown that would put all the latent power to work digging rivers, moving mountains, destroying evil.

At least one person did not share the general mood. Mitchell pulled away from the shoulder pressing him on the left and asked, "Are you sure you want to go through with this?"

Thomas looked at MacDonald. MacDonald raised one hand in deprecation and shook his head.

The three men were sitting in the top row of the stadium. The floor was far below. It was packed with ranks of portable chairs; all of them were filled. The only empty space in the vast arena was the square in the middle. Over the intervening heads stretching from the foreground almost to infinity, the distant square looked very small.

Mitchell pulled away again with a barely controlled twitch of aversion and persisted, "I've seen these things get out of control."

In front of them people turned and frowned; others, farther away, looked around to locate the source of the voices.

MacDonald shook his head quickly.

"It's not too late to go back to the booth," Mitchell said. "With the closed-circuit television and all, we'd have a much better view and a much better idea of what's going on." He turned to Thomas. "Tell him, George."

Thomas raised his shoulders and hands helplessly.

MacDonald touched a finger to his lips. "It will be all right, Bill," he said softly. "It's not enough just to see it and hear it. You've got to feel it."

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"I feel it," Mitchell muttered.

More faces were turning in their direction. Mitchell made an obscene gesture at them with his finger.

Thomas leaned toward Mitchell's ear. "The difference between you and Mac," he said softly, "is that you dislike people and you hate situations you can't control. There are many like that in our business."

"People!" Mitchell muttered.

THE lights in the stadium went out as if the hand of God had opened and let night fall over them instead of trickling through His fingers. In the darkness the roof seemed about to drop in and the sense of closeness seemed to grow as though the audience were swelling to fill the entire space.

Mitchell controlled a rush of panic. He breathed deeply. "Damn him," he said. "He can't do this."

But there were no screams, no scufflings, only the hushed expectancy of people waiting for a miracle to be performed.

And a single, powerful shaft of light descended from the top of the dome, split the darkness, created a white circle in the center of the stadium floor.

In the center of the circle stood a single figure. In the entire stadium only that figure was visible. Everyone stared at it, could not help but stare.

Only the part of the audience in the portable chairs close to the circle could be sure of what the figure was. From where Mitchell sat, it resembled the kind of stick drawing of a person a child might make.

The merest impression came to him—of white and flesh-pink and black, of thin, of tall, of arms held up, outstretched to encompass the audience as the figure turned—an audience that could not be seen or heard in the darkness.

Slowly, however, the impression of listeners returned, only this time they were one entity, one living thing; the fleshy circuit that had connected the individual members earlier had now grown solid. The audience waited for the message.

The figure stood alone in the embracing circle of light. It and the light were all. No microphone, no platform, no table or chairs were in evidence, only the lonely figure amid a silent audience of tens on tens of thousands.

"Speak, damn it, speak," Mitchell muttered, but he knew the man in the circle would wait, draw out the moment into a fine, glittering wire of expectation just about to break. The old bastard knew what he was doing.

The audience seemed to hold its breath.

The figure spoke and the voice,

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magically, filled the dome stadium like the voice of God, coming from nowhere, coming from everywhere. The voice moved the audience, shook it, reunited it. The voice reinforced the linkages, stepped up the power.

The voice spoke and its sound was wisdom; it was truth.

"We are alone."

The audience moaned an antiphonal response.

"That is the Message," the voice said. "The Message is from God.

"They say to you that the Message is from another world like ours, from people like us. But they do not know. They have heard the voice of God and they do not understand. They try to read it with their minds; they cannot do it. They must read it with their hearts. They must have faith.

"The Message is from God and it is carried by the angels who are the messengers of God. How can a Message come from someone else?"

The audience waited for an answer it knew would come.

"There is no one else but man and God. We are alone with God in the universe. That is the way it is. That is the way it was meant to be."

The words rippled the audience like a wind blowing across a valley of wheat.

"Why should we be afraid?" the voice asked. "Why should we refuse to recognize the truth when it is laid before us? God created the universe for His glory. God created man to wonder at the magnificence of the universe and to glorify God."

The audience took a deep breath.

"This is the meaning of the Message—of man's words returned to him, of his frivolity shown him as in a mirror—there are no others; we are alone . . ."

The words continued to come, unbidden, uncompelled, like a great natural phenomenon, like revelation. The force built up within the audience as if they were magnets being aligned until each field reinforced the next and the total field exerted by more than one hundred thousand persons thinking and feeling as one entity was great enough to pervade the entire city, to encompass the world, and even, perhaps, to shift the stars themselves . . .

THEY walked down the empty corridor underneath the stadium, their footsteps echoing from concrete walls and floor and ceiling, little puffs of dust and powdered concrete rising as their shoes fell. Dimly lighted by occasional ceiling bulbs, the corridor seemed to go on forever.

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"Well?" Thomas said and cringed from the reverberations. "Speak of 'man's words returned to him,' " he said.

"Bastard!" Mitchell said.

" '*On doit se regarder soi-même un fort long temps,*' " MacDonald said, " '*avant que de songer a condemner les gens.*' "

"What did he say?" Mitchell asked Thomas.

"That's a quotation from Moliere's *Misanthrope* about not judging others until you've taken a good long look at yourself," Thomas said.

Mitchell shrugged. "I've taken a good long look at him," he said.

"Are you sure this is the way?" MacDonald asked.

"This is what Judith told me," Mitchell said.

The corridor broadened into a room. Giant pistons supported the ceiling like so many hydraulic lifts. In the middle was a metal cage. Inside the cage were control panels with levers and vernier rheostats and large buttons painted red and green. The cage was locked and so were each of the controls.

The room was deserted; only their footsteps, pausing now, disturbed its silence.

"The magic," MacDonald said appreciatively.

"The son of a bitch," Mitchell said. "I think it's this way."

He led them past the control room and down another corridor to a door painted gray. He knocked lightly. When there was no response he knocked harder.

The door opened a crack. "Judith?" he said.

"Bill?" The door opened wider. A girl slipped into the corridor and gave Mitchell her hand.

She was small and slender with dark hair and large dark eyes seemingly all pupil. She was not exceptionally pretty, Mitchell thought in his more rational moments; perhaps it was the impact on him of the large pupils. He could be objective about the matter and yet feel an attraction to her that made her appear unique in all the world and therefore beautiful.

He squeezed her hand in place of a kiss. She disliked a public display of affection. Her Puritan upbringing, he had called it when they were first going together as undergraduates.

"Is the old bastard in there?" he asked.

"Bill!" she protested but without heat. "He is my father. And he's inside, resting. He's not well, you know. Sermons take a great deal of his strength."

"This is Mr. MacDonald," Mitchell said. "He's in charge of the Project."

"Golly!" Judith said. "I'm honored." She really seemed impressed.

"And this is Mr. Thomas,"

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Mitchell continued. "He's my boss."

"It's a collaboration," Thomas said.

"Judith Jones," Mitchell said. "My fiancée."

"Now, Bill," she said, "that's not strictly true."

They were talking in hushed voices like conspirators, and the reverberations in the corridor made the voices even stranger. Mitchell had an eerie sense of playing a part in a play in which the characters tried to communicate through endless, echoing caverns.

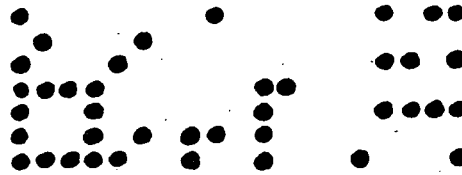
"Does your father know we're coming to see him?" MacDonald asked.

Judith shook her head. "He wouldn't still be here if he knew. He doesn't like to meet people. He doesn't like people who want things, who want him to do things, who want to argue with him. He doesn't have time, he says, but mainly he doesn't like it."

"Are we just going to break in on him?" MacDonald asked.

Judith frowned as if she were bracing herself for something unpleasant. "I'll introduce you. Try not to disturb him—too much." She turned toward the door and then turned back. "And try not to mind that he seems rude. He really isn't. He protects himself."

She opened the door and slid back into the room, leaving the door ajar behind her. "Father," Mitchell heard her say, "some men are here to see you."



JUDITH opened the door quickly before her father could speak. "This is Mr. MacDonald," she said. "He's in charge of the Project. And Mr. Thomas. He works with Bill Mitchell. And you know Bill."

The man was sitting in an old metal chair beside an old makeup table and mirror. The furnishings were from another era. The man seemed as old as they were, old enough to be MacDonald's father instead of Judith's. His hair was pure white and his face was lined. His eyes, as dark as Judith's, blazed up as the men entered—then the fire was gone, as if a door had been shut to hide it. The man looked down.

"I know Mitchell," the voice said. It was a tired voice, an old voice, a ghost of the voice that had filled the stadium above. "I know him as a foul-mouthed blasphemer, an atheist who scoffs at the beliefs of others, a lecher with the morals

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of a monkey. I know, too, that I told you not to see him again. Nor do I wish to see these others."

"Mr. Jones—" MacDonald began.

"Get out," the old man said.

"We are both older men, Mr. Jones," MacDonald began.

"Jeremiah," the old man said.

"Mr. Jeremiah—"

"Just Jeremiah. And Jeremiah does not talk to atheists."

"I am a scientist—"

"An atheist."

"I want to talk to you about the Message."

"I have heard the Message."

"Directly?"

Jeremiah placed one long, translucent hand on each bony knee and leaned toward MacDonald, looking up. "I have heard it from God," he said harshly. "Have you heard it more directly than that?"

"Did you hear it before the Project picked it up or afterward?"

Jeremiah sat back and sighed. "Goodbye, Mr. MacDonald. You wish to trap me—"

"To talk with you—"

"The Message I speak of is not your Message, which comes in riddles over waves. The Message—my Message—is from God and it tells me about yours. Is your Message from God?"

"It may be," MacDonald said.

Jeremiah was about to turn his back upon them, but he stopped and looked at MacDonald. So did Mitchell.

"I do not know from whom it is," MacDonald said, "so it may be from God."

"But you do not think so," Jeremiah said.

"I do not think so," MacDonald said. "But I do not know. I have not had a revelation like yours. My mind is not closed—is yours?"

"A mind is not closed which is open to truth but not to falsehood," Jeremiah said. "You have not read your Message, then?"

"No," MacDonald admitted. "But we will."

"When you do," Jeremiah said, dismissing them, "then come talk to me if you must."

"If—when—we do read it, if I send for you, will you come?"

Jeremiah's dark eyes looked into MacDonald's. "Before it is announced to the rest of the world?"

"Yes."

"I will come." A pale hand came up to support a head that drooped to meet it. When the others did not move, Jeremiah looked up. "What do you want of me?" he asked wearily.

"Your public meetings are stirring people up against the Project," MacDonald said.

The banked fires flickered. "I am speaking the truth."

"Your truth is creating an atmosphere in which people may shut down the Project, keep us

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from deciphering the Message, prevent us from listening for others."

"I speak truth," Jeremiah said. "We are alone. Nothing can change that. What happens when people know the truth is as God wills."

"But if the Message is from God—and meant for all of us, not just to you alone—should we not read it? And hear more?"

Jeremiah's long face grew longer. "The Message may be from Satan."

"In your sermon you said it was from God."

"That is true," Jeremiah said. "But Satan can deceive even those who listen to God." A translucent hand stroked a pale chin in thought. "I could be mistaken," he said.

MACDONALD took half a step toward Jeremiah, starting a gesture that he stopped in mid-air. "If you change your interpretation now, it would only confuse the faithful. Give us a chance to decipher the Message. I don't ask you to stop telling the truth as you see it, but at least do not incite your followers against the Project."

Jeremiah looked at MacDonald's hand until it dropped to his side. "What do you hope to decipher? The voices?"

"The voices from the Thirties?" MacDonald said and shook his head. "Those bits and snatches of the radio shows of that time, rebroadcast to us from the direction of Capella, are just the wave of the hand, the attention getter."

"Then what is the Message?"

"We're not absolutely sure. We think it's in the bursts of static between the voices. Slowed down, filtered for noise, for real static, it can sound like a real communication—dots and silence, dots and silence."

Jeremiah looked skeptical. "You could read anything you wished into dots and silence."

"We haven't. Not yet. But we're trying to read it right. The computers are working on it, trying to make some intelligent pattern out of it. We'll get it done. It just takes time. That's what we need—time."

Jeremiah said, "I can't promise anything."

"We'll let you know first."

"I can't promise anything," Jeremiah said again, but this time it was like a promise. "Now leave me alone. And, Judith—you must not see this man again." He motioned toward Mitchell. "I have told you so before, but I tell you now. You must choose between us. If you choose him, if you choose to disobey me, then I will not see you again."

"Damn it—" Mitchell began.

Judith stopped him. "Go on,

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Bill," she said. She stepped outside the door with them. "I'm not going to see you again, Bill, not alone."

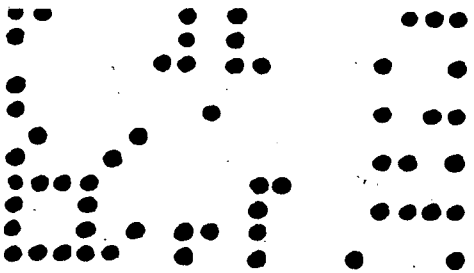
"I need you," Mitchell said. "We made plans—"

"He needs me," Judith said. "He's old. He's not well. He's not good with people." She went back inside.

"What a strange mixture of a man," Thomas said. "He can make thousands believe he speaks with God and he can't talk to another human being without trying to push him away, without rejecting the communication."

"You should try to understand him, Bill," MacDonald said gently. "He's asking for understanding in his way. He's asking for help. And you two are a lot alike."

"Damn him," Mitchell muttered, his soul filled with disgust for the human race. "Damn everybody!" He looked around. "Well, nearly everybody," he said.



THE taxi rolled silently through the traffic toward the airport.

Seated between Thomas and Mitchell, MacDonald said, "You've done a good job."

"Hah!" Thomas said.

MacDonald raised a hand to emphasize his sincerity. "I mean it. You and Bill and the others, with your articles and releases and interviews and programs and all the other techniques of communication, by now have won popular acceptance for the Project. No, not just acceptance—enthusiasm. The news that we have received a message from intelligent beings who live on a planet which probably circles one of the twin suns of Capella has been received without skepticism—with excitement but no panic. I don't know how it could have been done any better."

"I do," Mitchell said.

"You're setting your goals too high," MacDonald said. "After all, for fifty years nine persons out of ten had never heard of the Project and those who had mostly thought it was a waste of time and effort. And for more than fifty years experts have predicted that people would become hysterical when they were presented with proof of the existence of other intelligent creatures in the universe."

"Experts!" Thomas said.

MacDonald shook his head and

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chuckled. "All right, gentlemen, accept credit for bringing back radio." He leaned forward and twisted a knob until it clicked.

Music filled the taxi, first some of the current folk revival, then dance music from the Thirties. After a moment that faded and the sound that came back up was filled with static and broken transmissions . . . . Mitchell reached to turn it off.

"Some accomplishment," he said.

Thomas stopped his hand. "Wait!"

"CRACKLE," came over the radio. "Say good night grace POP-POP music CRACKLEPOP could have knocked me over with a fender POPCRACKLECRACK-LE knee this is rochest CRACK-LEPOP music CRACKLEPOP-POPPOP matinee idol larry POP-POP music: au revoir pleasant CRACKLECRACKLE the little theatre off POPPOPCRACKLE eye doodit CRACKLEPOP music POPPOPPOP who knows what evil POPCRACKLEPOP . . ."

"That's it, isn't it?" Mitchell said. "The Message itself." He found a strange kind of conviction in the poor quality of the reception.

"Part of it," Thomas said.

His voice was a little shaken, Mitchell thought, as if Thomas were reliving that moment in Puerto Rico when he had heard it first. He had changed, then, from a skeptic to a dedicated Project partisan. His self-assigned mission was to convince a great variety of publics that the Message was real, good, not be feared. His friends had not credited the change in Thomas, not at first, but then they too had listened to the Message and to George and had agreed to help. Mitchell had joined in the first month.

"Those are the sounds of yesterday and today," the radio announcer said. "Those are the sounds of the stars. That is part of the Message being received from Capella, forty-five light-years away from Earth. If you have any suggestions for deciphering the Message, send them to Robert MacDonald, Project, Arecibo, Puerto Rico. And now—another episode from a story begun ninety years ago . . ."

The voice faded and eerie music came up, modulated, and a deep voice asked, "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" The music came back up and faded. "The Shadow knows—"

Thomas twisted the knob until it clicked.

"A brilliant idea," MacDonald said, "but I don't know how we are going to answer all the mail."

"Any worthwhile suggestions?"

MacDonald shook his head. "Not yet. But who knows what brilliance lurks in the minds of men?"

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"Well," Thomas said, "we didn't expect any. Tell you what—we'll send somebody down to draft some standard replies, set them up on your computer."

"Good," MacDonald said.

"What are you going to do about the Chinese?" Thomas asked. "They've called the Message a capitalist plot to distract the world from American imperialism. Maybe we should have informed them before the public announcement."

MacDonald shrugged. "Don't worry about it. Their scientists have requested tapes."

"The Russians have announced that they picked up the Message a year ago," Mitchell said.

"They haven't asked for tapes," MacDonald said. "They're probably picking it up for themselves now that they know where to search."

Thomas sighed. "I'm afraid we're just creating more trouble for you."

MacDonald smiled. "'Law, Brer Tarrypin!' sez Brer Fox, sezee, 'you ain't see no trouble yit. Ef you wanter see sho' nuff trouble, you des oughter go 'longer me; I'm de man w'at kin show you trouble,' sezee."

The taxi pulled up at the airport and MacDonald retrieved his credit card from the meter as he got out.

"Come with me to the gift counter," he called over his shoulder to the others. "I want to pick up something for Maria and Bobby." When they drew abreast of him as he walked across the vast expanse of imitation marble, he said, "I've switched your reservations. I want you to return to Arecibo with me."

The floor vibrated as the electric catapult launched another jet. A moment later came a low *whoosh* and a fading thunder.

"I've got things here I should take care of before I leave," Mitchell said.

"For the sake of the Project," MacDonald said, "I think you should stay away from Judith for a while."

"You and Jeremiah," Mitchell said.

"He's a prophet, all right," Thomas said gloomily. "And a danger."

"That's why I want you to come back with me," MacDonald said. "I want you to get the feel of the Project again, the reality, the excitement of the impending breakthrough. If you can communicate this, it might counteract the growing influence of Jeremiah and his followers."

Thomas shook his head. "We won't counteract Jeremiah. He's an honest man possessed by a vision, like a poet. He has his own reality."

"He's an old bastard," Mitchell said.

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"He's a man whose basic beliefs have been severely threatened," MacDonald said, "and he reacts by defending his world. The Solitarians cannot coexist with the fact of intelligent life on other worlds."

"Then why did you invite him to the Project?" Mitchell asked.

"Because he is an honest man as well as a fanatic," MacDonald said. "I think we have an even chance, or a little less, that if he sees what we are doing, sees the translation, he will accept it and be able to change."

"Or he will reject it—or be destroyed," Thomas said.

"Yes," MacDonald admitted. "Those are the possibilities."

"How serious is his threat to the Project?" Mitchell asked.

"The most serious since its founding," MacDonald said. "How ironic—and somehow peculiarly appropriate to the history of the Project—that its most critical moment should come at the time it accomplished what it was created to do! Fifty years without results and no challengs, but the moment we received a communication our existence was threatened."

Thomas laughed. "Scientists are dangerous. They bought you off with toys, but when the toys turned out to be real they began to worry."

"What can the Solitarians do?" Mitchell asked. "Besides talk among themselves."

"They're big," MacDonald said, "and they're growing. They want the Project stopped and they're putting pressure on Senators and Congressmen. In spite of your good work, in spite of what I've called public acceptance, they still manage to exploit mankind's basic fear of meeting a superior. And there's no doubt that the Capellans are superior."

"How so?" Mitchell asked, and as he heard the words he felt that his tone was a little sharper than he had intended.

The floor shook again. The gift counter was just ahead. MacDonald already was running his gaze along the shelves.

"They're clearly older and more capable than we," MacDonald said. "Their giant red suns are older than our sun by millions—perhaps billions—of years, depending, say my astronomers, on the effect of mass on stellar evolution. In any case, we have not even been able to pick up radio broadcasts from other worlds, much less rebroadcast them so that the original world could receive them again."

" 'Who's that little chatterbox?' " Thomas half-sang, half-chanted, his gaze distant. "Pepsi-Cola hits the spot." He shivered.

MacDonald bought a new book, a romantic novel about love and

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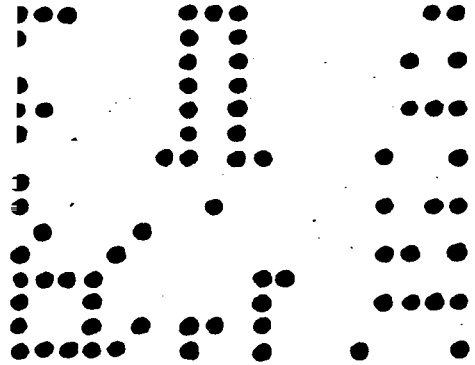
peril in orbit, for his wife. A three-dimensional scale model of the stars surrounding Earth to a distance of fifty light-years—including, of course, Capella—he chose for his son. And then, admitting that an eight-month-old infant would have little use for the model, at least for a year or two, he picked out for the babe a stuffed toy ostrich. It was so big that it had to go into the jet's baggage compartment.



"ROBBY!" Maria said in the little waiting room of the airport just outside Arecibo. She was frowning as she tried not to laugh at the gigantic bird with the long legs that stood in front of her. "Hush, now," she said to the crying child in her arms, "it won't hurt you." And then she said to MacDonald, "What a monstrous bird to give a baby!"

Mitchell thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He wondered what she would have been like at twenty or even thirty. Between Maria and his work, MacDonald had two magnificent reasons for remaining in Arecibo as much as possible.

"I'm a fool," MacDonald said, stricken. "I just can't seem to understand my own family."

"Considering," Thomas said, "how well he understands and communicates with everybody else."

"Ah!" MacDonald said deprecatingly. "What of Jeremiah?"

"At least you got him to listen," Thomas said, "and to promise to come."

Maria's smile burst upon MacDonald. "You did, Robby? You won him over?"

"Nothing as final as that," MacDonald said. "Here, now, let me hold him."

He held out his arms to the squalling boy. The baby went to him willingly, trustingly, but not looking at the stuffed bird all the same. In a moment or two the infant's yells turned to sobs and the sobs to silence.

"Now, Bobby," MacDonald said, "you know your father wouldn't bring you anything that would hurt you—though, to be sure, it might frighten you at first. Well, come along," he said to the ostrich, putting his gaze on its

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black eyes, enigmatic in their plastic sockets, "we will grow up to you."

He tucked the bird under his other arm, turned toward the door and stopped. "What am I thinking of?" he asked Maria. "These are my guests. You know George, our own doubting Thomas. And this other handsome gentleman is Bill Mitchell, who is a star-crossed lover."

"Hello, George," Maria said, presenting her cheek to be kissed. "Hello, Bill," she said, extending her hand. "I hope the stars are as kind to you as they have been to me."

"It's not all that serious," Mitchell said, trying to keep his tone light. "You know, a stubborn father, a girl who must choose—it will all work out."

"I know it will," Maria said, and Mitchell was swayed for a moment by her conviction. "Come," Maria said, "I will fix you all a good Mexican supper."

As Maria withdrew her hand from his, Mitchell caught a glimpse of a white scar that crossed her wrist.

"*Querida*," MacDonald said apologetically, "we ate on the plane."

"You call that eating?"

"Besides," MacDonald said, "we are on our way to the Project. We've still got work to do. Tomorrow—before these gentlemen must fly back to New York—you can fix a big dinner. Okay?"

Partially mollified, she gave him a comic shrug and a broad: "Hokay."

He laughed.

They put their bags and the ostrich into the trunk of MacDonald's car. The baby was relieved when the stuffed bird disappeared: he settled comfortably onto his father's shoulder. Maria drove. She handled the car skillfully for a woman, Mitchell thought, particularly for a beautiful woman. The old steam turbine hummed peacefully under the hood as they climbed the quiet green hills in the night.

It had been a long day that started in New York and ended in Puerto Rico by way of Texas and Florida, and Mitchell should have been exhausted. But for him the evening was enchanted. He did not know why. Perhaps it was the Puerto Rican quiet after the urban congestion of Texas, perhaps the automobile taking them farther from civilization, perhaps the calm beauty of MacDonald's wife, perhaps their domestic chatter in the front seat. Usually this kind of thing embarrassed him, this talk of food and family in which he played the role of an unwilling eavesdropper, but somehow this was different.

Maybe, he thought, *people are not so disgusting* . . .

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HE LOOKED at Thomas. Even Thomas felt it. This man of tangled nerves, one-time poet and novelist, sometime muckraking reporter, now committed propagandist for the Project and its cause, was staring quietly out a window as if he had packaged all his worries and mailed them back to Manhattan.

The journey in the moonlight went on. Mitchell found himself wishing it would never end, this trip beyond time and space, but then he saw below them a valley that gleamed metallic in the night. Across the valley some giant spider had been busy spinning cables in a precise mathematical pattern; it was a web to catch the stars. Beyond it they came upon a giant ear cocked to the sky to hear the whispers of the night.

And then the car drifted onto a broad parking lot that gleamed phosphorescently in the moonlight and came to a stop beside a long, low concrete building. Mitchell blinked. The spell faded. It faded slowly. Looking back later Mitchell thought that it continued to color his impressions for as long as he stayed on the island.

They left the car. MacDonald placed the sleeping child gently in the seat and strapped him down. He kissed Maria and murmured something about his plans.

Thomas and Mitchell took their bags out of the trunk; Mitchell removed the ostrich. "I'll keep him at the office for a while," he said, "until Bobby gets used to him."

The car whispered away. MacDonald opened the door to the building.

"Here we are."

Thomas stopped in the doorway and motioned toward the distant steerable telescope, moving slowly on its supporting arm.

"You're still searching?"

MacDonald shrugged. "Just because we picked up one message doesn't mean there are no others, that our search is ended. And we have engineers who are good at listening but not so good at understanding what they hear—so far, of course, none of us have been very good at that—and we don't want to lose them, to see the team broken up before the game is over.

They entered the building. The corridors were of painted concrete, the floors tiled, all lit by radiant fixtures. From the cars in the parking lot Mitchell had assumed the place was busy, but somehow he was unprepared for the bustle. Men walked purposefully along the halls, papers in their hands, nodding at MacDonald as if he had never been away, or talking eagerly to each other, not noticing MacDonald and the strangers. Or women moved past, more sociable, talking to MacDonald, asking about his trip, about Maria and

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Bobby, being introduced to the visitors.

And then MacDonald had them down the hall to an open door. "Here's our listening post," he said to Mitchell, pulling him by one arm into the doorway. For some reason Mitchell did not mind being guided.

THE room was filled with electronic equipment, a computer, recording devices; it smelled of ozone. Two men were in the room, one at a panel against a wall, tinkering with its wiring, the other sitting in a chair, earphones over his head. He looked up, waved and turned one earphone out toward MacDonald in a gesture of invitation. MacDonald waved back and shook his head.

"What's with the bird?" the listener called out.

MacDonald shook his head again. "It's a long story. I'll tell you later." He turned back to Mitchell. "Any other time I'd take you in and show you what we have here. I'd let you listen to the music of the spheres, the sound of the infinite, the voices of the damned who cannot make themselves understood, but right now we don't have time."

"Don't do it," Thomas warned Mitchell, half-seriously. "You'll never be the same. That's what makes them all so strange."

"You want to hear the Message," MacDonald asked, smiling. "You want to know why we haven't deciphered it in six months of effort. Six months and the Solitarians gather their forces, Congress grows nervous about appropriations and the efforts of clever, dedicated communicators like you and George are in danger of being frittered away."

Mitchell shook his head.

"You're right," MacDonald said. "We haven't deciphered the Message and we should have done it by now with all the minds and all the computers we've had working on it. Come on. I'll show you."

They passed other doors, other rooms where doors were open and men and women worked at desks or benches or panels. The computer room was at the end of the corridor. It was called the computer room apparently, because instead of walls it had computers and the floor was so filled with data-input keyboards and printers that there was scarcely room to walk between them.

At the keyboard amid the computers, like a witch surrounded by familiars, sat a middle-aged man with salt-and-pepper hair cut short.

"Hello, Oley," MacDonald said.

"You brought me a present," the other said.

MacDonald sighed, took the ostrich out from under his arm,

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put it in a distant corner and said, "No, Oley, I brought you some guests." He introduced Mitchell to Olsen, his computer expert. Thomas had met him before.

Mitchell looked around at all the machines, trying to guess what they all did.

"Any breakthroughs?" MacDonald asked.

"We're lucky we haven't lost ground," Olsen said.

"Play your best selection for our visitors," MacDonald said.

Olsen pressed two keys on his keyboard. A visual display appeared on a window in front of him, broken rows of white numbers on a gray background, but Mitchell looked at it only for a moment. They he was listening to sounds that came from concealed speakers—a soft hiss, then silence, then a noise, silence, more noise. Sometimes the noise would be loud, sometimes soft, sometimes brief, sometimes extended, sometimes a click, sometimes a buzz or a plop.

MITCHELL looked at Thomas and they both looked at MacDonald. "I can get better messages from a thunderstorm," Mitchell said.

"That's part of the problem," MacDonald said. "Part of what we get between the rebroadcasts of our old radio programs is static. Add the effect of distance, of interruption, of fading. But part of what we pick up, we think, is communication. The problem is how to distinguish one from the other. Tell them what we're trying to do, Oley."

"First we try to clean up the transmission," Olsen said. "Filter out the natural noise electronically, I mean. We try to eliminate what is clearly casual, then run a series of variables on what is questionable, hardening up the signals, reinforcing them where necessary—"

"Show them what we get when we clean it up," MacDonald said.

Olsen pressed two more keys. From the speakers came a firm series of sounds and silences, like the buzz of an old-fashioned international code without the dashes: a dot and another dot, a long silence—six more dots, a silence—seven more dots, silence—dot, silence—dot . . .

They listened, Mitchell and Thomas, trying to make sense out of it, and finally looked up sheepishly for there was no way they could decipher the message just by listening to it.

"There's something hypnotic about it all the same," Mitchell said.

"But that's no better than the other," Thomas said, "and it's not real. This isn't the way it originally sounds."

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Olsen shrugged. "The unfiltered stuff isn't, either. It's just the way our particular speakers interpret the small packets of energy picked up on our radio programs of ninety years ago. With the help of the computers we have reinterpreted the message in sounds that seem more familiar or more meaningful."

"And you still can't read it," Thomas said.

Olsen nodded. "We've still got problems. We're trying to find duplications, repetitions, patterns. We don't know where the message starts or where it ends, whether it's one message given over and over again or a series of messages. Sometimes we think we've found something; it works for a while and then it falls apart."

"Found what?" Mitchell asked. "A statement?"

"In what language?" Olsen asked.

"Well, mathematics, maybe. Like one and one equal two—or the Pythagorean theorem or something."

MacDonald smiled. "That would be useful for catching our attention, for demonstrating that it was a message sent by intelligent beings, but they've done that, don't you see? With the rebroadcast of our radio programs."

"What kind of message could they send that would mean anything?" Mitchell asked.

"Sound and silence," Thomas mused. "Sound and silence. It must mean something."

"Dots and silence," Mitchell said. "That's what Mac told Jeremiah. Dots and silence. That's what it sounds like, too. Dots and no dashes. Dots and blanks."

MacDonald looked quickly at Mitchell. "Say that again."

"Dots and silence. That's what you said. To Jeremiah."

"No," MacDonald said. "What you said after that."

"Dots and no dashes," Mitchell repeated. "Dots and blanks."

"Dots and blanks," MacDonald repeated. "Dots and blanks."

"Dots and blanks," MacDonald mused. "What does that remind you of, Olsen? A crossword puzzle? Do you suppose— The old Drake game?" He turned to Olsen. "Let's try it. For all the combinations of prime numbers."

He turned to Mitchell. "Bill you send a message to Jeremiah over my signature. Three words. 'Come. Message deciphered.' "

"Are you so sure you have the answer?" Thomas asked. "Can't you wait to make certain?"

"You've felt that confidence before," MacDonald's tone made it a question, "the feeling that you know you have the answer even before you try it out, a kind of instant communication?"

"Yes," Thomas said. "Yes."

"And I want Jeremiah to be

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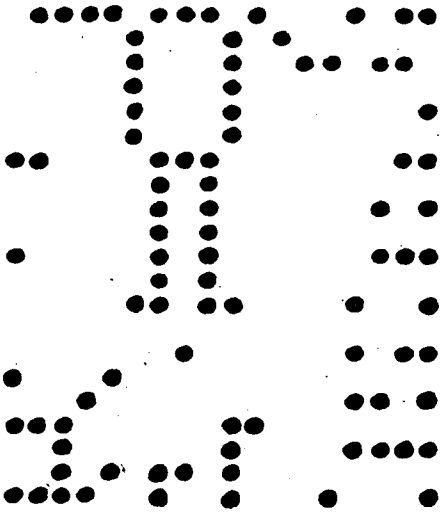
here when we run it off for the first time," MacDonald said. "I think that may be very important."

Mitchell paused at the door. "You aren't going to try it until then?" he asked incredulously.

MacDonald shook his head slowly.



THE room already was crowded with people when Jeremiah and Judith and MacDonald came through the door. Thomas was there and Olsen and a dozen more of MacDonald's colleagues on the Project.

Mitchell had been surprised when Jeremiah's message arrived—he had outdone MacDonald's brevity by a word, "I come—" and even more surprised when Judith's message arrived soon afterward giving the arrival time. Mitchell had never known Jeremiah to fly, and he had not thought the old man would come at all.

The wait for Mac to return from the airport with Jeremiah had been nearly unendurable for Mitchell; how much more difficult must it have been for the others who had been working so long on the Project? But they were remarkably patient. They shifted their positions from time to time as they waited, but no one moved to leave, no one complained, no one urged Olsen to give them a preview. Perhaps, Mitchell thought, they had been selected for patience by the long years of the Project when they had achieved nothing but negatives. Or perhaps they were an exceptional group of men and women shaped into a high-morale group by MacDonald's leadership.

Mitchell did not find himself repelled by their proximity. He found himself liking them individually—even collectively.

Jeremiah entered the room like a high priest wrapped in his robes of office, aloof, cold, unapproachable. MacDonald tried to introduce him to the members of his staff, but Jeremiah waved him

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away. He studied the machinery on wall and floor, ignoring the people.

Judith followed him, nodding at the people they passed as if to make up for her father's absence of humanity. Mitchell's flesh grew taut as he saw her again—and he wondered why it was Judith, why it was this one girl among many, who made him shiver.

Jeremiah stopped in front of MacDonald, as if they were the only two persons in the room, and said, "It takes all this to read one small Message? For the faithful it requires only a believing heart."

MACDONALD smiled. "One small difference between us makes necessary all the apparatus. Our faith requires that all data and results can be duplicated by anyone using the same equipment and techniques. And with all the believing hearts in the world, none, I think, has received identical Messages."

"It isn't necessary," Jeremiah said.

"I understand that your communications are highly personal," MacDonald said, "but wouldn't it be wonderful if the important Messages could be received by all the faithful?"

Jeremiah looked at MacDonald. It seemed to Mitchell that these two men were alone in the room and that they were battling for each other's souls. He reached out and took Judith's hand. She glanced at him and then down at their hands and then away, not speaking. But she didn't take her hand away and Mitchell thought he felt her fingers tighten.

"You did not bring me here to scoff at my faith," Jeremiah said.

"No," MacDonald said, "to show you mine. I, too, have had my revelation. I do not compare it with yours. It has no identifiable source. It is an inner conviction that has grown from a small thought to a large certainty that there is other life in the universe, that to prove its existence is the most gloriously human thing man can do, that to communicate with it would make this vast, incomprehensible place in which man lives, this unexplored forest of the night, a friendlier, happier, more wonderful, more exciting, holier place in which to be."

Mitchell looked at the other faces in the room. They were staring at MacDonald and Mitchell had the feeling that they, too, were hearing MacDonald's credo for the first time, that he had lived it but never expressed it before. Now he was unveiling himself before this skeptical stranger as if Jeremiah's belief in him mattered more than anything else. Mitchell's hand tightened on Judith's.

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Jeremiah was frowning. "I did not come all this way to argue theology," he said harshly.

"I'm not arguing," MacDonald said earnestly. "And I'm not dealing in theology, not the way I see it, although I may infringe upon those areas you have declared sacred to your beliefs. I'm trying to explain myself, you see—"

"Why?" Jeremiah asked.

"Because it's important to me that you understand," MacDonald said. "I want you to know that I am a man of good will."

"Most dangerous of all are men of good will," Jeremiah said, looking like a prophet in his old-fashioned black suit, "For they are easily deluded."

"I am not easily deluded," MacDonald said.

"You want to believe. You are easily deluded. And you will find what you wish to find."

"No," MacDonald said, "it cannot be that way. I will find what anyone can find, whatever his beliefs and desires, what you would find if you should look and listen. What I am trying to tell you is that no matter what my intentions, my hopes, my fears, my message is not like yours. It can be checked. It must read the same to everyone, every time, or it is wrong and will be discarded."

Jeremiah's lips curled. "You do not interpret? You read it directly as it comes to you?"

MACDONALD sighed. "We clean it up," he admitted. "The natural universe makes a great deal of noise, somewhat like the noise of a city—and we must filter that out."

Jeremiah smiled.

"We have techniques," MacDonald said. "They are verifiable. They work. And then there is the signal itself. It must be identified, analyzed."

Jeremiah nodded. "And then?"

"And then," MacDonald admitted, "we must interpret the Message. It is not a simple matter, you understand, because the Message comes from far away, so far it takes forty-five years for the signal to reach us. And it comes from an alien mind."

"Then you will never read your message," Jeremiah said, "or you will read into it whatever you wish, because there is no possible communication between alien minds."

"What about man and God?"

"Man is made in God's image," Jeremiah said.

MacDonald made a gesture of frustration and then continued. "What alien minds have in common is intelligence and the natural universe. Matter reacts in the same way everywhere in the universe, forming the same elements which combine in the same way to form molecules—the same kinds of energy are available, all obedient

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to the same physical laws. Beings everywhere must cope with their environment in the certain basic ways to satisfy basic needs. And if they communicate with each other in a variety of ways—they will find ways that compare with the experience of other intelligent creatures. And if they try to communicate with other worlds they will refer to these common experiences: measurements, mathematics, sensory impressions, images, abstractions—"

"Faith?" Jeremiah asked.

Judith's hand tightened on Mitchell's.

"Perhaps—" MacDonald began.

"Don't patronize me," Jeremiah said.

"But we would not know how to depict faith," MacDonald went on without pausing.

Jeremiah gestured impatiently. "I believe you are sincere. You may be deluded, but you are sincere. Show me what you brought me here to see and let me return to my mission."

"All right," MacDonald said. He seemed like a defeated man. Mitchell felt sorry for him, but he could have told him that no effort to reason with Jeremiah would succeed. Mitchell had tried it too often in the past. Jeremiah was immovable. How did one reason with a fanatic? "I just want you to understand what we have done," MacDonald continued, "so that the result is intelligible to you when it comes from the computer. Olsen?"

"We kept searching for a meaningful pattern in the brief bursts of energy we were receiving—" Olsen began.

"*You* tell me," Jeremiah said to MacDonald.

MacDonald shrugged. "Dots and silence. That's what I said to you. Dots and silence. And then Bill here said, 'Dots and blanks,' and something fell into place. The Capellans might be trying to send us a visual message with the sounds standing for black dots and the silences for white spaces. Frank Drake suggested the possibility more than fifty years ago. He sent a message to fellow scientists made up of a series of ones and zeroes and his colleagues made a picture out of it. Perhaps we should have thought of it. Our excuse, I suppose, is that we didn't have a neat little row of binary symbols; instead we had dots and long silences, and we weren't sure when the message began or when it ended. Now I think we can do it. We have asked the computer to plot the Message onto a grid, using prime numbers for the sides of the grid, breaking up the silence into signals equaling the dots in duration, like a switch turning on and off."

"Or like a computer," Olsen interjected, "with only two num-

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bers, one and zero."

"If we plot the signals as dark and light," MacDonald said, "then we may come up with a recognizable picture."

"May?" Jeremiah asked. "You haven't tried it yet?"

"Not yet," MacDonald said. "Sometimes a man has a conviction—you might call it a revelation—that he has found the answer. I think we have found it. I wanted you to see it with us, the first time."

"You had a revelation?"

"Perhaps. We'll see."

"I don't believe it," Jeremiah said, turning away. "You are trying to deceive me. You would not bring me here without having tested your theory first."

MACDONALD put out a hand as if to touch Jeremiah and stopped. "Wait. You have come this far. At least see what we have to show you."

Jeremiah stopped. "Do not tell me any more lies," he said harshly. "Show me your deception from the machine and let me go."

"For God's sake," said someone from among MacDonald's colleagues, "let's get it over with." The man's voice was shaky.

In the corner the stuffed ostrich looked over the proceedings with inscrutable eyes. There were some advantages Mitchell thought, to not caring if you understood others or they understood you.

MacDonald sighed and nodded at Olsen. The computer expert punched a sequence of buttons on the keyboard in front of him. Tapes turned on one of the computer consoles and then on another. Before Olsen a series of ones and zeroes appeared on the screen, faded, were replaced by others. Before Jeremiah a continuous roll of paper began to reel silently out of the printer.

The first few grids were meaningless.

"Folly," Jeremiah muttered and again began to turn.

MacDonald was in his way. "Wait!" he repeated. "The computer is running through the small prime numbers across and down and then the other way, exploring all the possibilities."

The computer reached nineteen plotted against all the smaller prime numbers and then the larger ones. Suspense grew at the same rate as disappointment. The computer hummed. Paper reeled from the printer.

Then it began, something that looked intelligible, printed from the bottom, line by line.

"There's something," MacDonald said. "Look!"

Sourly, skeptically, Jeremiah looked and then with growing disbelief continued to look.

"That square in the corner,"

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MacDonald said, "that could be a sun. Those dots on the right. They look like—look like—"

"Binary numbers," Olsen said.

"But not quite," MacDonald said.

"They're printed from the right," Olsen said. "Look, nine, eight, seven, six, five—"

"Of course," MacDonald said, exultation growing in his voice, "why should we expect them to read from the left, why not the right, like the Japanese, or from the bottom up?"

"This is ridicu—" Jeremiah began.

"But what are those symbols on the left-hand side?" MacDonald asked. "And on the right-hand side of the sun?"

"Measurements?" someone suggested.

"Formula?" said another.

"Words?" suggested a third.

"Maybe words," MacDonald said. "Numbers on the right, printed horizontally, words on the left with a vertical component. It looks like they're building up a vocabulary of numbers and words."

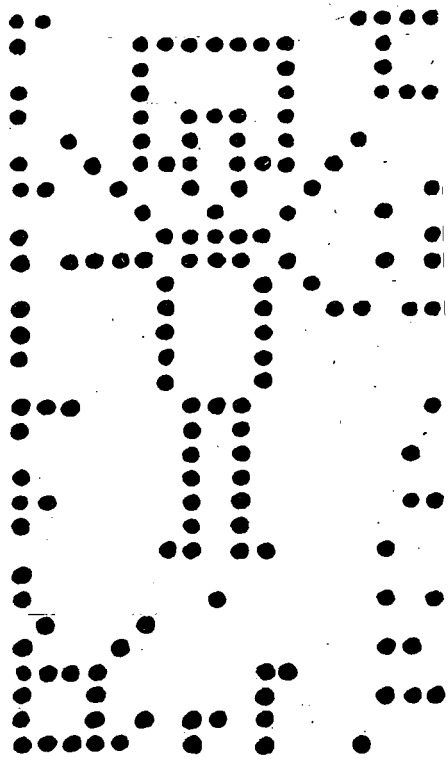
"Legs," Jeremiah muttered. "Feet."

"Yes," MacDonald said. "Long legs, and a body, arms—more than one set of arms, and over there at the right—what?"

"If those are words on the left," someone said, "then one of them is repeated three times."

"Must be important," someone else said. "It looks like the creature is pointing at two of them."

And then the picture was complete. Olsen pressed a key. The printer stopped. The computer stopped. In silence they stared at the picture.



"If that's a sun in the lower left, then that's another sun in the upper right," someone said. "Of

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course. Two suns. Capella."

"And that set of dots below it—" MacDonald pointed—"a large planet, perhaps a super-Jovian, with four satellites, two of them larger, perhaps Earth size. The being is pointing at one of them with one of his four arms."

"Not arms," Jeremiah muttered. "Two are wings."

"But what's that thing on its head?" someone asked.

Jeremiah put his hands together in front of him and lowered his face to them, his eyes closed. "Forgive me," he said. "Forgive me for doubting. It is a message from God."

"What is he talking about?" Mitchell asked Thomas.

"Quiet," Thomas said softly.

The others in the room quieted, too, their comments dwindling one by one.

Finally Jeremiah lifted his head from his hands. "I will not stand in your way," he said to MacDonald. "I will tell my people that I have seen the Message and the Message is from God. I do not know what it says, but this much I know. It is up to you to read the rest of it."

"I am as much surprised as you are," MacDonald said.

"I believe that. It would not have happened this way had you planned it. This is an angel. It has a halo."

"A halo," Mitchell echoed.

"It could be a helmet," MacDonald said gently. "Or earphones. Or a bird with a large head."

"You may speculate as you wish," Jeremiah said. "But it is a halo. If you do not deny it is an angel, speculate as you will, I will not deny that the Message is from God, that there are other beings, that we call them angels."

"You may call them angels," MacDonald said as if expressing a formal agreement. "I will not say you are mistaken. There is much to speculate about and little that we can be sure of."

"Come, Judith," Jeremiah said.

"Father," Judith said, "Bill has something he wants to say."

"I misjudged you, sir," Mitchell said. He had been wrong about the old man. Jeremiah was not a phony. He faced a difficult job, going back and reinterpreting the Message to his followers, but he did not flinch. He had seen the truth and changed. Perhaps, Mitchell thought, he himself had been wrong about some things.

"I have felt that you were bad for my daughter," Jeremiah said, "that you did not like people."

"I am beginning to like them better," Mitchell said.

"Well," Jeremiah said, turning toward the door, "we will see."

"I'll drive you—" Mitchell began.

"Not yet," Judith said, giving

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his hand a squeeze as she joined her father. "In time. If you wish." And she followed her father's stiff back through the doorway.

"WHAT luck!" Mitchell said to MacDonald. "What magnificent luck! Or was it?"

Thomas looked at Mitchell and then at MacDonald. MacDonald was staring at the picture drawn by the printer. He had not heard the question.

"One thing you've still got to learn," Thomas said to Mitchell, "is that no two people are alike. To understand Mac you must understand that he wouldn't cheat."

"Not even to save the Project?" Mitchell asked skeptically. "Not even to do tremendous good for man and Capellan? Not even to counteract stubborn mysticism and ignorance?"

"It sure looks like a big bird," someone said.

"If it's a bird," someone else said, "maybe that dot under its feet is an egg."

"One of the three identical words on the left, if they are words, is opposite the egg, if it is an egg," Olsen said.

Mitchell was eyeing Thomas.

"Not even then," Thomas said. "Not because he wouldn't be tempted, not even because he would be found out, but because of what he is and because he can't be what he is and be expedient and because he knows it."

"Look," someone said, "the two suns are different."

MacDonald did not move from the spot where he could look directly down upon the printout. The conversation flowed around him, but he did not seem to hear it. He looked as if he, too, had seen an angel.

Mitchell watched the others in the room. Each one was reacting differently; each one, like Jeremiah, was seeing the same message but reading it according to his own particular interpretation.

Mitchell shook his head and saw the stuffed ostrich in the corner. He walked to it and looked into its black pupils.

"You're the only one I really understand," he said.

He turned and looked at the room and all the people clustered about the Message, and he thought about all the equipment and personnel and time that had gone into receiving the Message. His vision broadened to include the steerable radio telescope outside cocked to the night sky and the big array in the valley catching stardust and he imagined himself traveling across great, dark infinities alone in space for long years.

He shivered.

Who, he thought desperately, *will understand me?* ★

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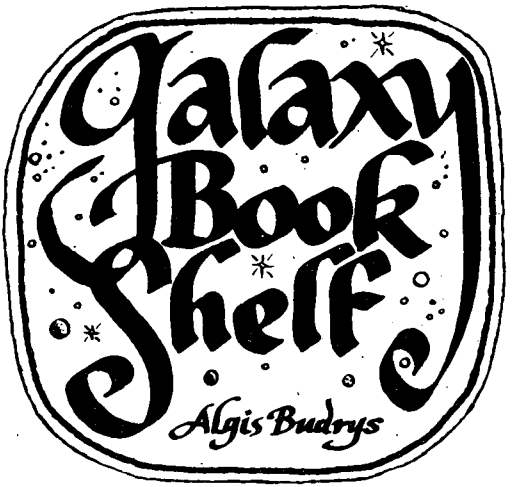

SO we did this column about what commercial writing is like, and a fair number of professional writers were nice enough to agree with what was said. I got one nasty letter, from a nonprofessional, who assured me that Norman Spinrad and Harlan Ellison were somehow exempt from human processes.

I don't know Spinrad that well, But I know Harlan Ellison; we owe each other money and we've starved and scratched together and separately. He's seen the gray look on my face and I've seen it on his. There is no harder scratcher in this field; the only writer of any kind I've seen in the same league with Ellison was Dick Gehman five years ago, and I'd still bet on Harlan to take the pot even if Gehman held cards and spades. And maybe even the good ten. For all I know, Spinrad's been on foundation grants all his life, though I seriously doubt it, but all the writers I know—and like anyone else with

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twenty years in the business I know hundreds with well-established bylines—have either got to make a buck today or else worked hard enough to make two bucks yesterday. That's the system.

There have been a few, in the past, who hit hard enough young enough, or who worked in Europe where things are sometimes different, or who are wrapped in antiquity, who somehow in popular thought stand away from the commercial moil.

There are many who are outwardly smooth enough so that it doesn't show . . . for a while. (Did you think James T. Farrell was stuffed and put in a museum? Do you really think Hemingway incubated that last weak novel in his publisher's safe just to be cute? What do you hear from Nelson Algren?) Somehow, we like to think, there is a place where writers can go happily to live on the past; a perpetual Thanatopsis Society that's been meeting at the Heavenly Algonquin ever since Bill Shakespeare's day. (There's nothing in the grave; the dust is pure gold, and odorless). Lenny Bruce entertains at cocktail hour.

But we do, in science fiction, have our little circle of gods who must somehow have escaped the process; people whose work is (paradoxically) somehow better because it was worked away from the usual pastures of pulp. We believe that way—or, rather, some of you believe that way; I don't—because deep down underneath some of us do believe that writing for a living is *per se* incompatible with excellence. Seen through the enchantment lent by distance, there is this circle of people whose work is better because they never had to learn how to lie to a bill collector. We talk about Wells, and Verne, as if they never started at the sound of the doorbell; we've found out about Zamyatin; we've been brought up to date on Capek.

Well, I don't believe *that*, either. Wells had a very rough time of it. Verne was like Gehman and Charles Dickens. What I believe in is excellence, and it so happens I see it in several of the gentlemen named above, most of whom I know for a fact were scratchers and biters—though that may indeed be beside the point. Keeping the circle down to dead writers for purposes of discussion, though, and striking a balance between my perhaps idiosyncratic view and the popular legend, let's call them the Classicists in this field.

WHAT to do then, with Stanislaw Lem? Walker and Company has published the first English language translation of one

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of his novels (*Solaris*, $4.95). Now at last those of us whose Polish is not up to the reading level can get some idea of the actual scope of this man who is sometimes compared to Verne and Capek, and who is considered fit company for Wells, Stapledon, and a number of other names which make the earth to tremble as their memory strides by in the night.

To help us, in addition to the translation by Joanna Kilmartin and Steve Cox, there is an *Afterword* by Professor Darko Suvin, in the form of an essay on Lem's career to date. This provides thumbnail synopses of his 18 books, and among many other useful facts the information that Lem has been translated into some 40 languages. (Bear that last part in mind, will you?)

Suvin, who takes science fiction very seriously and is building a reputation as a teacher in Canada and as a critic, had been Lem's foremost sponsor in our circles. And to tell the truth, it would be nice to find another certified literary giant in this field—those other fellows have not been producing much lately.

There is something intrinsically attractive in the image of a major talent locked away from our particular enclave, working, working, working, flirting briefly with the few bright leaves of American and English sf that flutter into his gloomy cognitive cell, rejecting them finally in 1965 "a point at which he seems to have given up western sf in disgust" according to Suvin, and molding his own expression at last out of the diverse elements of classic sf, commercial sf of the 1940s and 50s, and the cultural heritage of Eastern Europe. Surely what such a man might accomplish would be recognizably powerful on the one hand, and contagiously innovative on the other.

But what to do with what we have of Stanislaw Lem? The translated *Solaris* is not rendered into our Anglic symbological context from the Polish, a Slavic language, but from a Romance (French) translation—it is a Xerox of a Xerox at best, and more likely a pale carbon.

Nor is Suvin's contact with his protege an intimate one:

"Since Lem is too busy to answer bibliographical questions, my information had to be obtained from his agent Mr. Franz Rottensteiner and a variety of minor secondary sources of unknown accuracy, indeed intermittently contradictory. The bibliograpy should be fairly accurate, since Mr. Rottensteiner's data (very helpful in this endeavor) have been independently checked by myself."

There is something about all this which smacks irresistibly of the James Thurber story about the re-

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nowned novelist who never wrote a word and whose epitaph was "Our loss is Hell's gain." But since we are here dealing with a snapshot of a shadow thrown on a translucent panel, that kind of wisecrack is not only cheap, it is infinitely reproducible. Literally, the atmosphere wrapped about this entire project is that anybody can be making anything he pleases out of anything he claims to perceive, without fear of definitive contradiction.

It so happens that Professor Suvin's bibliographical sketch of Lem's general approach indicates that enigma is exactly the writer's strong suit; certainly, this particular utterance of *Solaris* fits right into the spirit. The problem is not that one can't make heads nor tails of it; one can make as many as one desires and have parts left over no matter what sort of chimera results. Since the locale of the book is a planet whose sole native inhabitant is an apparently living pangenic ocean with inconsistent and capricious powers, and the narrative is a catalogue of futile efforts to make sense of what the ocean does in—debatable—response to human investigation, we are indeed left with what Suvin calls "The open-ended parable of Stanislaw Lem and *Solaris*," and others might call a hoax.

Why not? Going by what little can be gathered from the thready evidence of this diffused volume, Suvin could be benignly kidding either us or himself, and the same could be true of Lem. They could both be members of that populous tribe of earnest metaphysicians which has done so much over the centuries to make European philosophical scholarship a scrupulous study with ambiguous results.

IN LEM'S or Suvin's case, we could be seeing an illustration of the fact that while we may grant that genius consists of an infinite capacity for taking pains, an infinite taking of pains does not require the capacity of a genius. See your nearest postal clerk.

The plot of *Solaris*, which Suvin inaccurately calls a detective puzzle—apparently not as aware of the formalities of that genre as he is of classic science fiction—is an unresolved one; Kelvin, the protagonist, is shown attempting to come to grips with the enigmatic nature of the "ocean" on Solaris, the (presumably) single planet of the Centaurian binary system.

That is the sole and entire plot. Kelvin has this problem, as hundreds of Terrestrial investigators have had it before him, and in the end he—and everyone else—still has it.

There are several sub-plots, one

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or two of which do resolve. For instance, the investigative base is an artificial station floating above the "ocean," suspended by magnetic and gravitic fields. Once staffed by numerous technicians and by robots of unspecified functional ability, it now reflects the downhill nature of the enterprise by having only three living staff members—Snow, who is frightening and disillusioning himself to death; Sartorius, who stays in his room and rattles apparatus; and Kelvin, who arrives to find that Gibarian, his preceptor, is newly dead. The robots are locked away.

Apart from a barefoot Negress who lies sleeping against Gibarian's body in the cold storage room, and the unseen but fierce creatures whom Sartorius and Snow attempt to keep suppressed in their quarters, there are no other actors to account for the broken locks, bent doors, smashed panels and scattered laboratory equipment, except for Rheya, Kelvin's suicidal woman, who shortly turns up in his cabin, is very possessive of him, and is capable of reattempting suicide by drinking liquid oxygen without suffering damage of any great duration.

The phenomenon of these inhumanly resilient doppelgangers accounts for the mystery of the smashed furnishings, thus resolving one sub-plot which endures for several early chapters because Snow, who could clear it up in a paragraph, simply refuses to say the words. Apparently, they are sent by the "ocean" as, perhaps, instruments to study the investigators. (Since attempts to obtain even the slightest privacy from them are what drives them into frenzy, the "instrument" hypothesis is one of the few probably valid conclusions to be drawn about them by the station staff).

The doppelgangers—which simply materialize on board the station—are apparently created by the "ocean's" being able to read the subconscious minds of the station personnel and supplying each with the one individual who represents their greatest psychic trauma. Thus Kelvin gets a representation of Rheya, who died years ago on Earth when he left her. (Suvin says "wife"—there is no evidence for a formal relationship, however). Now she can't be separated from him. She's unkillable; the best he can do is trick her on board a reconnaissance rocket and fire her off into orbit, where, perhaps, she continues to pound against the casing long after the "oxygen" runs out.

Since Lem specifies that Kelvin comes to the station in a similar vehicle while wearing a pressurized suit, it's not clear why the

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rocket also has a life-support system; Terrestrial technology as depicted in *Solaris* is long past the point of having to design redundancy into its space vehicles. In any event, next night a fresh copy is on hand, unaware that she's a duplicate, amnesiac about most of her past except that she loves Kelvin.

A few rudimentary experiments, hitherto unperformed by any previous staff member on his own doppelganger, reveal that Rheya is based on neutrino structures, as distinguished from atomic.

I'm not competent to know whether this is gibberish; two stages of translation intervene between my poor power and the author's perhaps plausible rationale. However, there are curious other parallels between Suvin's style in bibliographical sketches and Lem's narrative:

"The symmetriad (One of several types of spontaneous hardened formations which appear on the planetary being's usually liquid surface from time to time) now begins to display its most exotic characteristic—the property of 'illustrating,' sometimes contradicting, various laws of physics . . . The interior of the symmetriad becomes a factory for the production of 'monumental machines,' as these constructs are sometimes called, although they resemble no machine which it is within the power of mankind to build: the designation is applied because all this activity has finite ends, and is therefore in some sense 'mechanical.'"

This has to be bad translation to some extent. The shift within the definition, which begins by talking about factories and constructs and ends with reference to activity, is difficult to explain otherwise. Similarily, though the word here is "machines," what Lem goes on to describe are exclusively architectural features—groins, vaults, pillars, etc.—rather than shafts, gears, cathodes, lenses, resonators and other transmission devices. Since anything recognizably mechanical must by definition have recognizable parts with centuries-old names, they are *prima facie* not at all beyond the power of interstellar Mankind to build. Nor is that business about "finite ends" a usual or useful description of mechanical qualities. It would permit a tree to be described as a machine, and while one certainly could so describe any organism, I fail to grasp why one should accept verisimilitude for an appellation so far in left field as "monumental machines" instead of such far more likely ones as "cathedra," "amphitheatra," or even "architectura."

BUT not all of this is enigmatic solely in the language. Howev-

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er he couched it, Lem fails to illustrate his assertion that the symmetriads "in which even the laws of physics do not hold" (P. 117), have the property of illustrating, (P. 118) sometimes contradicting, various laws of physics.

The laws of physics obviously do hold; Lem shows us nothing being done by the symmetriad which cannot be accomplished by pressure, tension, compression and gravitic manipulation on the same order as that employed by the Terrestrial station. That *is* gibberish, down on the basic level of thought, rather than among superficialities of expression.

Perhaps he means Newtonian physics or, more likely, Archimedean mechanics. Even then very little happens in the symmetriad that Archimedes couldn't understand on the spot. I venture to say nothing happens that Archimedes couldn't account for after a few weeks of night school. For one thing is very clear—the Solaris phenomena have never been studied by a single first-class mind, out of the hundreds that have come to do so; certainly, the three chucklehead "scientists" who resolutely fail to do anything fundamentally rational in *Solaris* have to be—to put it mildly—charletans.

You may have felt the stirrings of a powerful story in the doppelganger sub-plot. Little actual trace of it emerges from the Walker rendering. In the particular case of Kelvin and the second Rheya, with whom he says he is in love—says to her and to us—there is no incidence of tenderness. There are speeches—*Solaris* is full of speeches and excerpts from books on Solaris—but there is no confirming action; no moment when Kelvin is shown forgetting himself long enough to take delight in Rheya's form or habits, or in the slightest personal intimacy accurately described. I specifically don't demand scenes of throbbing sexual passion here; rather, I would expect that a writer trying to work with this situation, in which Kelvin is said to be trapping himself by loving the "ocean's" instrument, would show us examples of their emotional fixation on each other, as far more revelatory than their mutual inability to be physically apart.

There's a difference between "sleeping together" and sleeping together.

(Eventually, by the way, Sartoris and Snow destroy Rheya offstage with a neutrino-structure-neutralizing machine Sartoris has whipped up in the laboratory where he's haunted by a neutrino-structured doppelganger who watches his every move. Kelvin goes off and sits on a symmetriad, and the narrative ends).

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There is really only one remaining kind hypothesis to be held about this book, and about Lem as we glimpse him here and in the Suvin essay. That is that the man is definitely not a Verne or Wells or Stapledon—none of those gentlemen would have found merit in talking scientific nonsense in a science-fiction story—however allegorical or satirical. That leaves Capek, and the proposition that Lem is being funny. But one fast pass through *R.U.R.* or *The War With the Newts* also shows a mind too precise to think that satire excuses logical contradiction.

So that comparison, too, is washed out.

Lem's unique gift to the kind of science fiction written by classicists, then, apparently is no more than an infusion of the same lack of logical rigor as that which distinguishes much "New Wave" commercial sf of the 'sixties, in which illusions of profundity are generated by imprecise reference, paradoxic exposition and a ruthless unwillingness to let the characters act as smart as they say they are. You can accomplish anything that way—prove that all the angels can dance on the head of a pin, indite a treatise on a lifetime's study of the properties of Phlogiston, sit burning in the ruins of your house while rapt in contemplation of the Panacea.

But to be a true contributor to literature and deserve the reputation of having refined human awareness to even the slightest extent—as Wells has, as Capek and Stapledon may have, as Verne the ingenious commercial hack has not—you have to play by rules other than your own, and that makes it harder.

The burden is not really on Lem; at no point in *Solaris* does the author speak. Who knows whether he aspires to be a giant? There's nothing in the contract that says every writer must commit himself to a serious exploration of human nature, conducted in a manner whose every step is beyond question as sound experimental technique; that's a tougher row to hoe than many hands are fit for. One can be charming and entertaining while eschewing all that, and ashamed before no one.

No, the burden falls on those who want to place Lem in the pantheon with Capek, Zamyatin, and those other fellows. An advocate who goes on to mention Yefremov and the Strugatskys in the same breath with his candidate is already begging the question; if he's got a giant under the saddle, what's he doing entering him on the same track with mere competents?

★

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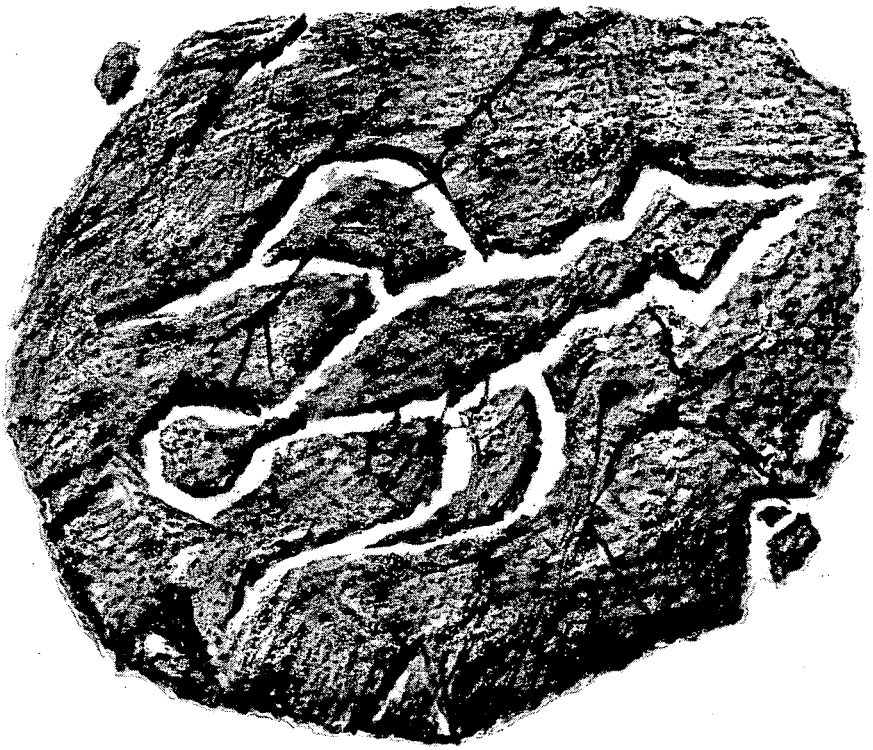

**In any armaments race,
the way to think is BIG!**

JACK SHARKEY

RATE OF EXCHANGE

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"IT CAN hardly be continental drift," said the pale anthropologist. "There is no way these shards could have found their way from the bottom of the mid-Atlantic to the Bay of Bengal. My theory is that this is all that remains of the cargo of a merchant vessel between Atlantis and primeval India."

"Then why," said his ruddier-complected companion, "is the clay of a sort found only in the Indian Ocean area? It had to be fired there."

"Perhaps it was," said Fredrik Wilkes, the anthropologist, with a dismissive shrug of his thin shoulders. "I see no reason why the ship could not have been en route *from* India to ancient Atlantis when it sank. Since the original tablet must have been borne by a courier —at least, it seems to be some sort of battle bulletin—it is certainly logical that it be inscribed in the Atlantean tongue, since that was the language spoken by the people at the tablet's intended destination, George."

George Bradley, the man addressed, chuckled and shook his head.

"You miss my meaning, Fred. The kind of continental drift I had in mind was the cataclysmic kind —straight down. My contention is that this tablet came from the lost continent of Lemuria. The continent was reputedly located in the Indian Ocean, as I suppose you know."

"And inscribed in the Atlantean tongue?" said Wilkes, with a skeptical sniff. "Don't be ridiculous. Atlantis and Lemuria had nothing in common."

"They both vanished from the face of Earth," George observed dryly.

Wilkes' normal pallor flushed a splotchy pink. "You know very well what I mean. There is no proof the two continents even existed in the same age!"

George lifted the deeply inscribed rectangle of fired clay and turned it slowly over between his thick strong fingers.

"There's this," he said quietly.

It was the anthropologist's turn to chuckle and he took it.

"Are you postulating an intercontinental war between Atlantis and Lemuria, George?" he scoffed. "There is no evidence of one in this message, if you are."

"What I'm postulating," George said slowly, "is an intercontinental *entente* between the two, against a common enemy. This message," he said, tapping the hard clay tablet with a fingernail for emphasis, "I believe to be an urgent cry for help—one which never arrived in Atlantis—from the doomed Lemurian continent."

Wilkes removed rimless bifocals to stare better at his friend.

"You're not suggesting the com-

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mon enemy possessed the firepower to wipe that continent off the globe?" he said incredulously. "There's not a nation on the planet today that could pull off such a cataclysm. Level an enemy country, yes, right to the bare soil. But sink a continent? Never!"

"*Two* continents, Fred. Two. Atlantis went under shortly thereafter."

"But what enemy? There is no record of any civilization existing at the time of Atlantis that could do more than launch an army of foot soldiers in an attack—and on wooden ships, at that. What enemy could possibly—"

"No enemy on Earth," George interrupted. "If you take my meaning."

"An extraterrestrial enemy?" exclaimed the other man. "Are you saying Atlantis and Lemuria fell victim to an *interplanetary* war?!"

"Not quite," said George. "What I had in mind was more—interstellar." He turned the tablet toward his friend and jabbed a finger toward a row of archaic Atlantean symbols. "What does this particular glyph convey to you?"

"Superstitious poppycock," said Wilkes. "The ancient necromancers of the land undoubtedly found the zodiacal aspects very poor for battle and were warning the generals against a move which did not fit their horoscope."

"Fred," said George, patiently, "what does it say—exactly?"

Fred Wilkes considered the line in question carefully, then pursed his lips and blinked owlishly. Then he replaced his spectacles and read it again. After a moment, he looked up at George. "Well," he said reluctantly, "I think I see what you mean—that bit about 'the stars against us' *could* have a bit more rational meaning than the usual astrological interpretation. But surely—"

"We're only absolutely sure of one thing," said George. "Atlantis and Lemuria were continents—one in the Atlantic, the other in the Indian Ocean—and, within a relatively short space of time of one another, both were wiped out."

"Are we to assume, then, that the same thing occurred with the enemy?"

"What do you mean?" asked George.

"This message—from Lemuria to Atlantis, if we grant your theory—states that attack is imminent and that some terrible retaliation has been planned. Since we are not hipdeep in aliens, George, I can only surmise that this intended counterattack was carried off successfully, right?"

GEORGE looked narrowly at the anthropologist. "I can tell by your momentary acceptance of my thesis that you are not con-

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vinced—you have a sardonic grin hiding behind that deadpan stare, my friend—right?"

The other man's smile broke through. "You know me too well," he murmured with mild chagrin. "Yes, I think I *have* found a rather large fly in your cosmic ointment—the time element, George."

George frowned. "I don't follow you."

"Atlantis—as recent artifacts and Carbon-fourteen tests prove—was a land that had ostensibly been civilized for better than a thousand years when it perished. It died at the height of its grandeur, in the full flower of its civilized maturity. Now, if we grant that the quarrel began with Orion—I am assuming now that the hunter-glyph in that star-phrase represents a *place* rather than a heavenly sign of the zodiac—if we grant that the quarrel began just before the end of the two continents—"

"Hold on," said George. "Why just before the end?"

"Let's postulate wildly a moment—envision a society as great as our own, in the technological sense—imagine all sorts of modern-day things on these two vanished continents—radar and missiles and lasers and the like—"

"All right," said George. "Let's. But why?"

"So that an attack from Orion—or a planet on one of the stars in what we today call Orion—could be detected before the superbombs landed. That would be the aforementioned fly in the ointment. George—have you forgotten just how distant the stars are from our own solar system? Even a missile hurtling out from here at the speed of light itself would take eons to arrive at its target. Let's say, though, that Lemuria's radar detected the oncoming Orion barrage and that Lemuria immediately activated its defense setup and fired a retaliatory barrage back at the enemy, shortly before its destruction. The avenging missiles would not have struck their star-distant target for more than a millennium of time! Now, this being the case, what would be the point in sending an *urgent* message to Atlantis, telling what Lemuria had done? The messenger could have crawled the distance in the intervening years, and still arrived in plenty of time." Wilkes held a hand up to forestall George's reply. "And don't say it was because Lemuria had detected a backup barrage of missiles timed to strike Atlantis as the Earth rotated it into target range shortly after the first barrage—the continent-sinking barrage—had struck Lemuria."

George faltered. "That is what I was going to say."

"And you don't see the flaw in all your theorizing?"

George shook his head.

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"I'm sorry, Fred, but I really don't see any flaw."

The anthropologist laughed benignly. "George—would a civilization that could boast radar and interstellar missiles ever be likely to send an urgent dispatch by *foot-messenger* inscribed upon a *clay tablet*?"

George sat silent for a long moment. Then he said almost wistfully, "No. No, I guess it wouldn't. Not with radio or telephone or some such device at its disposal. I guess my theory was a bit cockeyed—"

And then he stopped.

"What is it, George?" asked Wilkes, oddly uncomfortable at the expression on the other man's face. His friend reached out and gripped his forearm.

"Fred—if that clay tablet—hard-fired and nearly indestructible—was not intended for the Atlanteans—then whom *was* it intended for?"

The anthropologist looked at the tablet once again. Its message seemed to hover there in deeply etched convolutions of fire-red warning. And his mind envisioned in the fraction of an instant the obvious corollary to his earlier theory: If the Lemurians fired a retaliatory barrage toward Orion—and that barrage *did* take millennia to reach its target—and the people of Orion were *not* destroyed by the avenging bombs—or else they detected the approach of their own doom in the same manner as had Lemuria . . . *Would they not send a new barrage, a reprisal barrage of their own, Earthward again?*

The same idea, in an even more insidious flash of insight, had come to his companion. "Fred," said George, "Orion would have had almost a thousand years extra development between the Lemurian retaliation and their own—in fact, twice a thousand years between the Lemurian-bound barrage and their second Earthbound retaliation-barrage. In all that time, their weaponry would have improved quite a bit, wouldn't it? I mean, what they dropped out of the cosmos onto Lemuria and Atlantis would be like a kid's firecracker compared to what they sent in the next wave, right?"

Fred nodded, unable to speak. Then he straightened, and his manner became a bit braver. "Of course," he said, with a trace of his former good humor, "you realize that all of this is simply unfounded theorizing?"

George did not reply. George was no longer there. In fact, at that moment, for a globular radius of some three billion miles in all directions from where the sun had been, nothing was any longer there. ★

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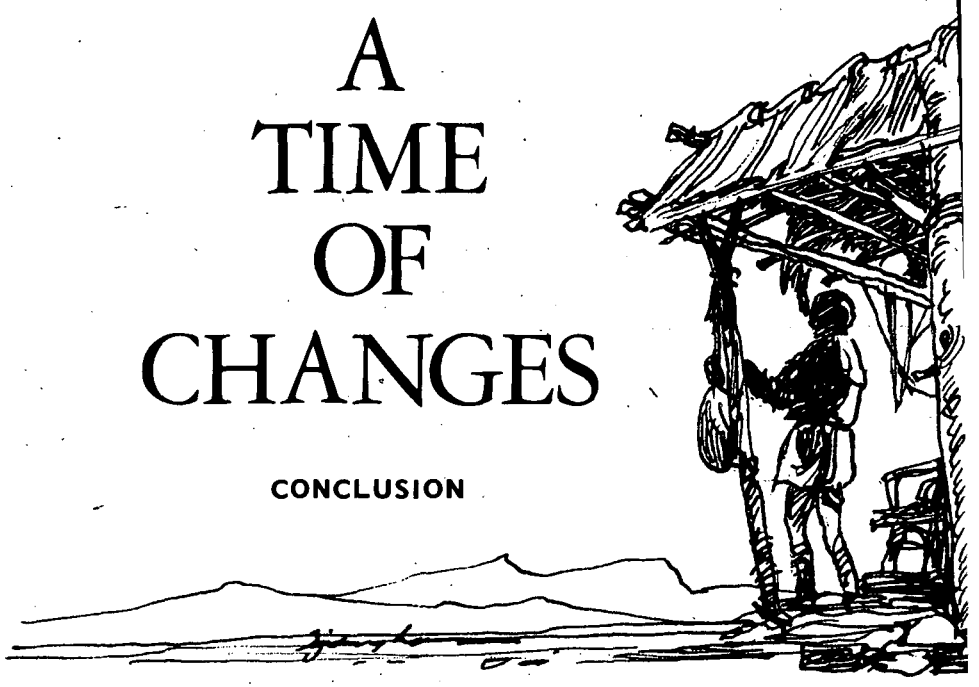
A TIME OF CHANGES



CONCLUSION

ROBERT SILVERBERG

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

This is an obscene book. It is the autobiography of Kinnall Darival, descendant of Earthlings. He is a prince of Salla, a province on the planet Borthan.

Borthan is ruled by the Covenant, a puritanical code that denies self. Even the pronoun "I" is never to be uttered—hence the "obscenity" of the autobiography. Only between bondbrothers and bondsisters is any "soul-bearing" permitted.

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Forced to flee Salla when his older brother, Stirron, succeeds to the throne after an accident kills the old septarch, Kinnall is helped by his bondbrother, Noim, and bondsister, Halum. But blood-kin in the neighboring province of Glin try to turn him over to Stirron's vengeance.

Kinnall escapes once more, finds cover as a common laborer. He decides to make his way as a commoner with the help of Halum's father, who controls trade in prosperous Manneran.

In gay, sophisticated Manneran, Kinnall prospers, marries Loimel, first cousin and physically the exact replica of Halum, his bondsister, for whom he has developed a hopeless and illicit passion. The marriage is neither good nor disastrous—and Kinnall encounters no major problems until he meets Schweiz, Earthman and interplanetary entrepreneur.

Schweiz introduces him to a life outside the Covenant—and to an illegal drug that induces "self-baring"—a cardinal offense.

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XIV

THAT afternoon a problem came to me concerning a ship from Threish and some false cargo manifests and I went to a pier to verify the facts. By chance I encountered Schweiz. Since parting from him a few days before, I had dreaded meeting him again; it would be intolerable, I thought, to look into the eyes of this man who had beheld my entire self. But then I saw him near me on the pier. He clutched a thick sheaf of invoices in one hand and was shaking the other furiously at some watery-eyed merchant in Glinish dress. To my amazement I felt none of the embarrassment I had anticipated, but only warmth and pleasure at the sight of him. I went to him. He clapped my shoulder and I clapped his.

"You look more cheerful now," he said.

"Much."

"Let me finish with this scoundrel and we'll share a flask of golden, eh?"

"By all means," I said.

An hour later, as we sat together in a dockside tavern, I said, "How soon can we leave for Sumara Borthan?"

The voyage to the southern continent was conducted as though in a dream. Not once did I question the wisdom of undertaking the journey, nor did I pause to ask myself why it was necessary for me to take part in person, rather than letting Schweiz make the trip alone or sending some hireling to gather the drug on our behalf. I simply set about the task of arranging for our passage.

No commercial shipping goes regularly between Velada Borthan and Sumara Borthan. Those who would travel to the southern continent must charter a vessel. This I did, through the instrumentality of the High Justiciary, using intermediaries and dummy signatories. The vessel I chose was no Manneranga craft, for I did not care to be recognized when we sailed, but rather a ship of the western province of Velis that had been tied down in Manneran Harbor for the better part of a year by a lawsuit. It seemed there was some dispute over title to the ship going on in its home port, and the thicket of injunctions and counter-injunctions had succeeded in making it impossible for the vessel to leave Manneran after its last voyage there. The captain and crew were bitter over this enforced idleness and had already filed a protest with the Justiciary; but the High Justice had no jurisdiction over a lawsuit that was being fought entirely in the courts of Velis. We therefore had had to continue the stay on the vessel's departure until word came from Velis that title was clear. Knowing all this, I

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issued a decree in the High Justice's name that would permit the unfortunate craft temporarily to accept charters for voyages to points "between the River Woyn and the eastern shore of the Gulf of Sumar." That usually was taken to mean any point along the coast of the province of Manneran, but I specified also that the captain might hire himself out for trips to the northern coast of Sumara Borthan. Doubtless that clause left the poor man puzzled and it must have puzzled him even more when, a few days later, he was approached by my agents and asked to make a voyage to that very place.

To avoid complications with the collectors of customs, among other things, I picked as our port of departure the town of Hilminor, in southwestern Manneran on the Gulf of Sumar. This is a medium-sized place that depends mainly on the fishing trade but serves also as a halfway stop for ships traveling between the city of Manneran and the western provinces. I arranged to meet our chartered captain in Hilminor; he then set out for that town by sea, while Schweiz and I made for it in a groundcar.

IT WAS a two-day journey via the coastal highway through a countryside ever more lush, ever more densely tropical as we approached the Gulf of Sumar. Schweiz was in high spirits, as was I. We talked to one another in the first person constantly; to him it was nothing, of course, but I felt like a wicked boy sneaking off to whisper "I" and "me" in a playmate's ear. He and I speculated on what quantity of the Sumaran drug we would obtain and what we would do with it. No longer was it just a question of my getting some to use with Halum: we were talking now of proselytizing everyone and bringing about a wholesale liberation of my self-stifling countrymen. That evangelical approach had crept gradually into our plans almost without my realizing it and had swiftly become dominant.

We came to Hilminor on a day so hot the sky itself seemed to break out in blisters. A shimmering dome of heat covered everything and the Gulf of Sumar, as it lay before us, was golden-skinned in the fierce sunlight. Hilminor is rimmed by a chain of low hills, which are thickly forested on the seaward side and desert on the landwards; the highway curved through them and we stopped at one point so that I could show Schweiz the flesh trees that covered the parched inland slopes. A dozen of the trees were clustered in one place. We walked through crackling tinder-dry underbrush to

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reach them: twice the height of men they were, with twisted limbs and thick pale bark, spongy to the touch like the flesh of very old women. The trees were scarred from repeated tapping of their sap, making them look all the more repugnant.

"Can we taste the fluid?" Schweiz asked.

We had no implements for making the tap, but just then a girl of the town came along, perhaps ten years old, half-naked, tanned a deep brown to hide the dirt; she was carrying an auger and a flask and evidently had been sent out by her family to collect flesh-tree sap. She looked at us sourly.

I produced a coin and said, "One would show his companion the taste of the flesh tree."

Still a sour look; but she jammed her auger into the nearest tree with surprising force, twisted, withdrew it and caught the gush of clear thick fluid. Sullenly she handed her flask to Schweiz. He sniffed it, took a cautious lick, finally had a gulp. And whooped in delight.

"Why isn't this stuff sold all over Velada Borthan?" he asked.

"The whole supply comes from one little area along the Gulf," I told him. "Most of it's consumed locally and a lot gets shipped to Threish, where it's almost an addiction. That doesn't leave much for the rest of the continent. You can buy it in Manneran, of course, but you have to know where to look."

"You know what I'd like to do, Kinnall? I'd like to start a flesh-tree plantation, grow them by the thousands and get enough juice bottled so we not only could market it all over Velada Borthan, but could set up an export deal. I—"

"*Devil!*" the girl cried and added something incomprehensible in the coast dialect, and snatched the flask from his hand. She ran off wildly, knees high, elbows outthrust, several times looking back to make a finger-jabbing sign of contempt or defiance at us. Schweiz, bewildered, shook his head.

"Is she crazy?" he asked.

"You said 'I' three times," I said. "Very careless."

"I've slipped into bad habits, talking with you. But can it really be such a filthy thing to say?"

"Filthier than you'll ever imagine. That girl is probably on her way to tell her brothers about the dirty old man who obscened at her on the hillside. Come on: let's get into town before we're mobbed."

"Dirty old man," Schweiz murmured. "Me!"

I pushed him into the groundcar and we hurried toward the port of Hilminor.

OUR ship rode at anchor, a small squat craft, twin screws,

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auxiliary sail, hull painted blue and gold. We presented ourselves to the captain—Khrisch was his name—and he greeted us blandly by the names we had assumed. In late afternoon we put out to sea.

The coast of Velada Borthan dipped from sight behind me and ahead lay only the grand open sweep of the Strait of Sumar. No land at all could be seen, neither aft nor fore. That frightened me. In my brief career as a Glinish seaman I had never been far from the coast and during stormy moments I had soothed myself with the comforting deceit that I might always swim to shore if we capsized. Here, though, the universe seemed all to be of water. As evening approached a gray-blue twilight settled over us, stitching sky seamlessly to sea, and it became worse for me: now there was only our little bobbing, throbbing ship adrift and vulnerable in this directionless, dimensionless void, this shimmering antiworld where all places melted into a single nonplace. I had not expected the strait to be so wide. On a map I had seen in the Justiciary only a few days before the strait had had less breadth than my little finger; I had assumed that the cliffs of Sumara Borthan would be visible to us from the earliest hours of the voyage; yet here we were amid nothingness. I stumbled to my cabin, plunged face first onto my bunk and lay there shaking, calling upon the god of travelers to protect me. Bit by bit I came to loathe myself for this weakness. I reminded myself that I was a septarch's son and a septarch's brother and another septarch's cousin, that in Manneran I was a man of the highest authority, that I was the head of a house and a slayer of hornfowl. All this did me no good. What value is lineage to a drowning man? What use are broad shoulders and powerful muscles and a skill at swimming when the land itself has been swallowed up, so that a swimmer would have no destination? I trembled. I think I may have wept. I felt myself dissolving into that gray-blue void. Then a hand lightly caught my shoulder. Schweiz.

"The ship is sound," he whispered. "The crossing is a short one. Easy. Easy. No harm will come."

If it had been anyone else who had found me like that, any other man except perhaps Noim, I might have killed him or myself to bury the secret of my shame.

I said, "If this is what it is like to cross the Strait of Sumar, how can one travel between the stars without going mad?"

"One grows accustomed to travel."

"The fear—the emptiness—"

"Come above." Gently. "The night is very beautiful."

Nor did he lie. Twilight was past

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and a black bowl pocked with fiery jewels lay over us. Near cities one cannot see the stars so well because of the lights and the haze. I had looked upon the full glory of the heavens while hunting in the Burnt Lowlands, yes, but then I had not known the names of what I saw. Now Schweiz and Captain Khrisch stood close alongside me on deck, taking turns calling out the names of stars and constellations, vying with each other to display their knowledge, each one pouring his astronomy into my ear as though I were a terrified child who could be kept from screaming only by a constant flow of distractions. See? See? And see, there? I saw. A host of our neighboring suns, four or five of the neighbor-planets of our system and even a vagrant comet that night. What they taught me stayed with me. I could step out of my cabin now, I believe, here in the Burnt Lowlands, and call off the stars the way Schweiz and the captain called them off to me aboard ship in the Strait of Sumar. How many more nights do I have, I wonder, on which I will be free to look at the stars?

MORNING brought an end to fear. The sun was bright, the sky was lightly fleeced, the broad strait was calm and it did not matter to me that land was beyond sight. We glided toward Sumara Borthan in an almost imperceptible way; I had to study the surface of the sea with care to remind myself we were in motion. A day, a night, a day, a night, a day, and then the horizon sprouted a green crust for there was Sumara Borthan. It provided a fixed point for me, except that we were the fixed point and Sumara Borthan was making for it. The southern continent slid steadily toward us, until at last I saw a rim of bare yellow-green rock stretching from east to west. Atop those naked cliffs rose a thick gap of vegetation, lofty trees knitted together by heavy vines to form a closed canopy, stubbier shrubs clustering in the darkness below, everything cut down the side as if to reveal the jungle's edge to us in cross-section. I felt not fear but wonder at the sight of that jungle. I knew that not one of those trees and plants grew in Velada Borthan; the beasts and serpents and insects of this place were not those of the continent of my birth; what lay before us was alien and perhaps hostile, an unknown world awaiting the first footstep. In a tumble of tangled imaginings I dropped down the well of time and saw myself as an explorer peeling the mystery from a newly found planet. Those gigantic boulders, those slender, high-crowned trees, those dangling snaky vines, all were products of a raw, elemental

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mystery straight out of evolution's belly, which now I was about to penetrate. That dark jungle was the gate to somethng strange and terrible, I thought, yet I was not frightened so much as I was stirred, deeply moved, by the vision of those sleek cliffs and tendriled avenues. This was the world that existed before man came. This was as it was when there were no god-houses, no drainers, no Port Justiciary: only the silent leafy paths and the surging rivers scouring the valleys; the unplumbed ponds and the long heavy leaves glistening with the jungle's exhalations; the unhunted prehistoric beasts turning in the ooze and the fluttering winged things that knew no fear; the grassy plateaus and the veins of precious metals—a virgin kingdom and over everything the brooding presence of the gods, of the god, of the god, waiting for the time of worshipers. The lonely gods who did not yet know they were divine. The lonely god.

Of course the reality was nothing so romantic. There was a place where the cliffs dipped to sea-level and yielded to a crescent harbor. Here a squalid settlement existed, the shacks of a few dozen Sumarnu who had taken to living here so that they might meet the needs of such ships as occasionally did come from the northern continent. I had thought that all the Sumarnu lived somewhere in the interior—naked tribesmen camping down by the volcanic peak Vashnir—and that Schweiz and I would have to hack our way through the whole apocalyptic immensity of this mysterious land, unguided and uncertain, before we found what passed for civilization and made contact with anyone who might sell us that for which we had come. Instead, Captain Khrisch brought his little ship smartly to shore by a crumbling wooden pier and, as we stepped forth, a small delegation of Sumarnu came to offer us a sullen greeting.

You know my fantasy of fanged and grotesque Earthmen. So, too, I instinctively expected these people of the southern continent to look in some way alien. I knew it was irrational; they were, after all, sprung from the same stock as the citizens of Salla and Manneran and Glin. But had these centuries in the jungle not transformed them? Had their disavowal of the Covenant not laid them open to infiltration by the vapors of the forest and turned them into unhuman things? No and no. They looked to me like peasants of any province's back country. Oh, they wore unfamiliar ornaments, odd jeweled pendants and bracelets of an un-Veladan sort, but there was nothing else about them, neither tone of skin nor shape of face nor color of hair, that set them apart from the men I had always known.

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The homogeneity of mankind's genetic pool had spiked my imagination once again.

THERE were eight or nine of them. Two, evidently the leaders, spoke the dialect of Manneran, though with a troublesome accent. The others showed no sign of understanding northern languages, but chattered among themselves in a tongue of clicks and grunts. Schweiz found communication easier than I did and entered a long conversation so difficult for me to follow that I soon ceased to pay attention. I wandered off to inspect the village.

When I returned Schweiz said, "It's all arranged."

"What is?"

"Tonight we sleep here. Tomorrow they'll guide us to a village that produces the drug. They don't guarantee we'll be allowed to buy any."

"Is it only sold at certain places?"

"Evidently. They swear there's none at all available here."

I asked, "How long a journey will it be?"

"Five days. On foot. Do you like jungles, Kinnall?"

"I don't know the taste of them yet."

"It's a taste you're going to learn," said Schweiz.

He turned now to confer with Captain Krisch, who was planning to go off on some expedition of his own along the Sumaran coast. Schweiz arranged to have our ship back at this harbor waiting for us when we returned from our trip into the jungle. Krisch's men unloaded our baggage—chiefly trade-goods for barter, mirrors and knives and trinkets, since the Sumarnu had no use for Veladan currency—and got their ship out into the strait before night fell.

Schweiz and I had a shack for ourselves on a lip of rock overlooking the harbor. Mattresses of leaves, blankets of animal hide, one lopsided window, no sanitary facilities: this is what the thousands of years of man's voyage through the stars have brought us to. We haggled over the price of our lodgings, finally came to an agreement in knives and heat-rods and at sundown were given our dinner. A surprisingly tasty stew of spicy meats, some angular red fruits, a pot of half-cooked vegetables, a mug of what might have been fermented milk—we ate what was given us and enjoyed it more than either of us had expected, though we made edgy jokes about the diseases we were likely to catch. I poured out a libation to the god of travelers, more out of habit than conviction.

Schweiz said, "So you still believe, after all?"

"I replied that I found no reason not to believe in the gods,

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though my faith in the teachings of men had been greatly weakened.

This close to the equator darkness came on swiftly, a sudden black curtain rolling down. We sat outside a little while, Schweiz favoring me with some more astronomy and testing me on what I had already learned. Then we went to bed.

XV

FIVE days. Six, actually: either Schweiz had misunderstood, or the Sumarnu chieftain was poor at counting. We had one guide and three bearers. I had never walked so much before, from dawn to sunset, the ground yielding and bouncy beneath my feet. The jungle rising, a green wall, on both sides of the narrow path. Astonishing humidity, so that we swam in the air, worse than on the worst day in Manneran. Insects with jeweled eyes and terrifying beaks. Slithering, many-legged beasts rushing past us. Strugglings and horrid cries in the underbrush, just beyond sight. The sunlight falling in dappled streaks, barely making it through the canopy high above. Flowers bursting from the trunks of trees: parasites, Schweiz said. One of them a puffy yellow thing that had a human face, goggly eyes, a gaping pollen-smeared mouth.

We crept up the spine of the continent, emerging from the jungle for a day and a half to climb a good-sized mountain, then more jungle on the other side. Schweiz asked our guide why we had not gone around the mountain instead of over it, and was told that this was the only route, for poison ants infested all the surrounding lowlands: very cheering. Beyond the mountain lay a chain of lakes and streams and ponds, many of them thick with gray toothy snouts barely breaking the surface. All this seemed unreal to me. A few days' sail to the north lay Velada Borthan, with its banking houses and its groundcars, its customs collectors and its godhouses. That was a tamed continent, but for its uninhabitable interior. Man had made no impact at all, though, on this place where we marched. Its disorderly wildness oppressed me, that and the heavy air, the sounds in the night, the unintelligible conversations of our primitive companions.

On the sixth day we came to the native village. Perhaps three hundred wooden huts were scattered over a broad meadow at a place where two rivers of modest size ran together. I had the impression that there once had been a larger town here, possibly even a city, for on the borders of the settlement I saw grassy mounds and humps, quite plausibly the site of ancient ruins.

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The villagers surrounded us: not hostile, only curious. Northerners were uncommon sights. A few of them came close and touched me, a timid pat on the forearm, a shy squeeze of the wrist, invariably accompanied by a quick little smile. These jungle folk seemed not to have the sullen sourness of those who lived in the shacks by the harbor. They were gentler, more open, more childlike.

An interminable parley began among Schweiz, our guide, and three of the village elders. After the first few moments Schweiz was out of it: the guide, indulging in long cascades of verbal embellishments footnoted by frantic gesticulations, seemed to be explaining the same thing over and over to the villagers, who constantly made the same series of replies to him. Neither Schweiz nor I could understand a syllable of it all. At last the guide, looking agitated, turned to Schweiz and poured forth a stream of Sumarnu-accented Mannerangi, which I found almost wholly opaque but which Schweiz, with his tradesman's skill at communicating with strangers, was able to penetrate.

Schweiz said finally to me, "They're willing to sell to us. Provided we can show them that we're worthy of having the drug."

"How do we do that?"

"By taking some with them at a love ritual this evening. Our guide's been trying to talk them out of it, but they won't budge. No communion, no merchandise."

"Are there risks?" I asked.

Schweiz shook his head. "It doesn't seem that way to me. But the guide has the idea that we're only looking for profit in the drug, that we don't mean to use it ourselves but intend to go back to Manneran and sell what we get for many mirrors and many heat-rods and many knives. Since he thinks we aren't users, he's trying to protect us from exposure to it. The villagers also think we aren't users and they're damned if they'll turn a speck of the stuff over to anyone who's merely planning to peddle it. They'll make it available only to true believers."

"But we *are* true believers," I said.

"I know. But I can't convince our man of that. He knows enough about northerners to know that they keep their minds closed at all times and he wants to pamper us in our sickness of soul. But I'll try again."

Now it was Schweiz and our guide who parleyed, while the village chiefs stood silent. Adopting the gestures and even the accent of the guide, so that both sides of the conversation became unintelligible to me, Schweiz pressed and pressed and pressed. The guide resisted all that the Earthman was

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telling him and a feeling of despair came over me so that I was ready to suggest that we give up and go empty-handed back to Manneran. Then Schweiz somehow broke through. The guide, still suspicious, clearly asked Schweiz whether he really wanted what he said he wanted. Schweiz emphatically said he did and the guide, looking skeptical, turned once more to the village chiefs. This time he spoke only briefly with them and then briefly again with Schweiz.

"It's been settled," Schweiz told me. "We'll take the drug with them tonight." He leaned close and touched my elbow. "Something for you to remember, when you go under: *be loving*. If you can't love them, all is lost."

I was offended that he had found it necessary to warn me.

TEN of them came for us at sundown and led us into the forest east of the village. Among them were the three chieftains and two other older men, along with two young men and three women. One of the women was a handsome girl, one a plain girl and one quite old. Our guide did not go with us; I am not sure whether he was not invited to the ceremony or simply did not feel like taking part.

We marched a considerable distance. No longer could we hear the cries of children in the village or the barking of domestic animals. Our halting place was a secluded clearing, where hundreds of trees had been felled and the dressed logs laid out in five rows as benches to form a pentagonal amphitheater. In the middle of the clearing was a clay-lined firepit, with a great heap of firewood neatly stacked beside it; as soon as we arrived, the two young men commenced building a towering blaze. On the far side of the woodpile I saw a second clay-lined pit; about twice as wide as a large man's body; it descended diagonally into the ground and gave the appearance of being a passage of no little depth, a tunnel offering access to the depths of the world.

The Sumarnu showed us through gestures where we should sit: at the base of the pentagon. The plain girl sat beside us. To our left, next to the tunnel entrance, sat the three chiefs. To our right, by the firepit, were the two young men. In the far right corner sat the old woman and one of the old men; the other old man and the handsome girl went to the far left corner. Full darkness was upon us by the time we were seated. The Sumarnu now removed what little clothing they wore and, seeing them obviously beckoning to us to do the same, Schweiz and I stripped, piling our clothes on the benches behind us. At a signal from one of the chiefs the handsome girl rose and went

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to the fire, poking a bough into it until she had a torch; then, approaching the slanting mouth of the tunnel, she wriggled awkwardly feet-first into it, holding the torch high. Girl and torch disappeared entirely from view. For a little while I could see the flickering light of the firebrand coming from below, but soon it went out, sending up a gust of dark smoke. Shortly the girl emerged without the torch. In one hand she carried a thick-rimmed red pot, in the other a long flask of green glass. The two old men—high priests?—left their benches and took these things from her. They began a tuneless chant and one, reaching into the pot, scooped from it a handful of white powder—the drug! —and dropped it into the flask. The other solemnly shook the flask from side to side in a mixing motion. Meanwhile the old woman—a priestess?—had prostrated herself by the mouth of the tunnel. She began to chant in a different intonation, a jagged gasping rhythm, while the two young men flung more wood on the fire. The chanting continued for a good many minutes. Now the girl who had descended into the tunnel—a slim, high-breasted wench with long silken red-brown hair—took the flask from the old man and brought it to our side of the fire, where the plain girl, stepping forward, received it reverently with both hands. Solemnly she carried it to the three seated chieftains and held it toward them. The chieftains now joined the chanting for the first time. What I thought of as the Rite of the Presentation of the Flask went on and on; I was fascinated at first, finding delight in the strangeness of the ceremony, but soon I grew bored and had to amuse myself by trying to invent a spiritual content for what was taking place. The tunnel, I decided, symbolized the genital opening of the world-mother, the route to her womb, where the drug—made from a root, from something growing underground—could be obtained. I devised an elaborate metaphorical construct involving a mother-cult, the symbolic meaning of carrying a lighted torch into the world-mother's womb, the use of plain and handsome girls to represent the universality of womanhood, the two young fire-warders as guardians of the chieftains' sexual potency—and a great deal more, all of it nonsense, but—so I thought—an impressive enough scheme to be assembled by a bureaucrat like myself, of no great intellectual powers. My pleasure in my own musings evaporated abruptly when I realized how patronizing I was being. I was treating these Sumarnu like quaint savages, whose chants and rites were of mild esthetic

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interest but could not possibly have any serious content. Who was I to take this lofty attitude? I had come to them, had I not, begging the drug of enlightenment that my soul craved; which of us then was the superior being? I assailed myself for my snobbery. *Be loving*. Put aside courtly sophistication. Share their rite if you can and at the least show no contempt for it, feel no contempt, *have* no contempt. *Be loving*. The chieftains were drinking now, each taking a sip, handing the flask back to the plain-looking girl who, when all three had sipped, began to move about the circle, bringing the flask first to the old men, then to the old woman, then to the handsome girl, then to the young fire-tenders, then to Schweiz, then to me. She smiled at me as she gave me the flask. By the fire's leaping light she seemed suddenly beautiful. The flask contained a warm gummy wine; I nearly gagged as I drank. But I drank. The drug entered my gut and journeyed thence to my soul.

WE ALL became one, the ten of them and the two of us. First there were the strange sensations of going up, the heightening of perception, the loss of bearings, the visions of celestial light, the hearing of eerie sounds; then came the detecting of other heartbeats and bodily rhythms about me, the doubling, the overlapping of awarenesses; then came the dissolution of self and we became one, who had been twelve. I was plunged into a sea of souls and I perished. I was swept into the center of all things. I had no way of knowing whether I was Kinnall, the septarch's son, or Schweiz, the man of old Earth, or the fire-tenders, the chiefs, the priests, the girls or the priestess, for they were inextricably mixed up in me and I in them. And the sea of souls was a sea of love. How could it be anything else? We were each other. Love of self bound us each to each, all to all. Love of self is love of others; love of others is love of self. And I loved. I knew more clearly than ever why Schweiz had said to me, *I love you*, as we were coming out of the drug the first time— that odd phrase, so obscene on Borthan, so incongruous in any case when man is speaking to man. I said to the ten Sumarnu, *I love you*, though not in words, for I had no words that they would understand—and even if I had spoken to them in my own tongue and they had understood, they would have resented the foulness of my words, for among my people *I love you* is an obscenity and no help for it. *I love you*. And I meant it, and they accepted the gift of my love. I, who was part of them. I, who not long ago had patronized them as amusing primitives worshiping

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bonfires in the woods. Through them I sensed the sounds of the forest, the heaving of the tides and, yes, the merciful love of the great world-mother, who lies sighing and quaking beneath our feet and who has bestowed on us the drug root for the healing of our sundered selves. I learned what it is to be Sumarnu and live simply at the meeting place of two small rivers. I discovered how one can lack groundcars and banking houses and still belong to the community of civilized humanity. I found out what half-souled things the people of Velada Borthan have made of themselves in the name of holiness and how whole it is possible to be if one follows the way of the Sumarnu. None of this came to me in words or even in a flow of images, but rather in a rush of received knowledge, knowledge that entered and became part of me after a manner I can neither describe nor explain. I hear you saying now that I must be either lying or lazy to offer you as little specific detail of the experience as I have done. But I reply that one cannot put into words what never *was* in words. One can deal only in approximations and one's best effort can be nothing more than a distortion, a coarsening of the truth. For I must transform perceptions into words and set them down as my skills permit—and you must pick my words from the page and convert them into whatever system of perceptions your mind habitually employs; at each stage of this transmission a level of density leaches away, until you are left only with the shadow of what befell me in the clearing in Sumara Borthan. So how can I explain? We were dissolved in one another. We were dissolved in love. We, who had no language in common, came to total comprehension of our separate selves. When the drug at length lost its hold on us, part of me remained in them and part of them remained in me. If you would know more than that, if you would have a glimpse of what it is to be released from the prison of your skull, if you would taste love for the first time in your life, I say to you, Look for no explanations fashioned out of words, but put the flask to your lips. Put the flask to your lips.

WE HAD passed the test. They would give us what we wanted. After the sharing of love came the haggling. We returned to the village and in the morning our bearers brought out our cases of tradegoods. The three chieftains brought out three squat clay pots, the white powder visible within them. We heaped up a high stack of knives and mirrors and heatrods and they carefully poured quantities of powder from two of

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the pots into the third. Schweiz did most of the bargaining. The guide we had brought from the coast was of little value, for, though he could talk these chieftains' language, he had never talked to their souls. In fact, the bargaining inverted itself suddenly, with Schweiz happily piling still more trinkets into the price and the chiefs responding by adding more powder to our bowl, everyone laughing in a sort of hysterical good nature as the contest of generosity grew more frenzied. In the end we gave the villagers everything we had, keeping only a few items for gifts to our guide and bearers, and the villagers gave us enough of the drug to snare the minds of thousands.

Captain Khrisch was waiting when we reached the harbor. "One sees you have fared well," he remarked.

"Is it so obvious?" I asked.

"You were worried men when you went into this place. You are happy men coming out of it. Yes, it is obvious."

On the first night of our voyage back to Manneran, Schweiz called me into his cabin. He had out the pot of white powder and he had broken the seal. I watched as he carefully poured the drug into little packets of the kind in which that first dose had come. He worked in silence, scarcely glancing at me, filling some seventy or eighty packets. When he was done he counted out a dozen of them and pushed them to one side. Indicating the others, he said, "Those are for you. Hide them well about your luggage or you'll need all your power with the Port Justiciary to get them safely past the customs collectors."

"You've given me five times as much as you've taken," I protested.

"Your need is greater," Schweiz told me.

XVI

I DID NOT understand what he meant until we were in Manneran again. We landed at Hilminor, paid Captain Khrisch, went through a minimum of inspection formalities (how trusting the port officials were, not very long ago!) and set out in our groundcar for the capital. Entering the city of Manneran by the Sumar Road, we passed through a crowded district of marketplaces and open-air shops, where I saw thousands of Mannerangi jostling, haggling, bickering. I saw them driving their hard bargains and whipping out contract forms to close the deals. I saw their faces, pinched, guarded the eyes bleak and unloving. And I thought of the drug I carried and told myself, *If only I could change their frosty souls.* I had a vision of myself going among them, accosting strangers,

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drawing this one aside and that, whispering gently to each of them, "I am a prince of Salla and a high official of the Port Justiciary, who has put such empty things aside to bring happiness to mankind, and I would show you how to find joy through selfbaring. Trust me: I love you." No doubt some would flee from me as soon as I began to speak, frightened by the initial obscenity of my "I am." Others might hear me out and then spit in my face and call me a madman—and some might cry for the police—but perhaps there would be a few who would listen, feel tempted and come off with me to a quiet dockside room where we could share the Sumaran drug. One by one I would open souls until there were ten in Manneran like me—twenty—a hundred—a secret society of selfbarers, knowing one another by the warmth and love in their eyes, going about the city unafraid to say "I" or "me" to their fellow initiates, giving up not merely the grammar of politeness but all the poisonous denials of self-love that that grammar implied. And then I would charter Captain Khrisch again for a voyage to Sumara Borthan, return laden with packets of white powder and continue on through Manneran—I and those who now were like me—and we would go up to this one and that, smiling, glowing, to whisper, "I would show you how to find joy through selfbaring. Trust me: I love you."

There was no role for Schweiz in this vision. This was not his planet; he had no stake in transforming it. All that interested him was his private spiritual need, his hunger to break through to a sense of the godhood. He had begun that breakthrough already and could complete it on his own, apart. Schweiz had no need to skulk about the city, seducing strangers. And this was why he had given me the greater share of our Sumaran booty: I was the evangelist, I was the new prophet, I was the messiah of openness. Schweiz realized that before I did. Until now he had been the leader—drawing me into his confidence, getting me to try the drug, luring me off to Sumara Borthan, making use of my power in the Port Justiciary, keeping me at his side for companionship and reassurance and protection. I had been in his shadow throughout. Now he would cease to eclipse me. Armed with my little packets, I alone would launch the campaign to change a world.

It was a role I welcomed. All my life I had been overshadowed by one man or another, so that for all my strength of body and ability of mind I had come to seem second-rate to myself. Perhaps that is a natural defect of being born a septarch's second son. First there

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had been my father, whom I could never hope to equal in authority, agility, or might; then Stirron, whose kingship brought only exile for me; then my master in the Glinish logging camp; then Segvord Helalam; then Schweiz. All of them men of determination and prestige, who knew and held their places in our world, while I wandered in frequent bewilderment. Now, in the middle of my years, I could at last emerge. I had a mission. I had purpose. The spinners of the divine design had brought me to this place, had made me who I was, had readied me for my task. In joy I accepted their command.

THERE was a girl I kept for my sport, in a room on the south side of Manneran, in the tangle of old streets back of the Stone Chapel. She claimed to be a bastard of the Duke of Kongoroi, spawned when the duke was on a state visit to Manneran in the days of my father's reign. Perhaps her story was true. Certainly she believed it. I was in the habit of going to her twice or thrice each moontime for an hour of pleasure, whenever I felt too stifled by the routine of my life, whenever I felt boredom's hand at my throat. She was simple but passionate: lusty, available, undemanding. I did not hide my identity from her, but I gave her none of my inner self and none was expected; we talked very little and there was no question of love between us. In return for the price of her lodgings she let me make occasional use of her body and the transaction was no more complex than that: a touching of skins, a sneeze of the loins. She was the first to whom I gave the drug. I mixed it with golden wine. "We will drink this," I said, and when she asked me why, I replied, "It will bring us closer together." She asked, in no great curiosity, what it would do to us and I explained, "It will open self to self and make all walls transparent." She offered no protests—no talk of the Covenant, no whining about privacy, no talk of the evils of selfbaring. She did as she was told, convinced I would bring no harm to her. We took the dose and lay naked on her couch, waiting for the effects to begin. I stroked her cool thighs, kissed the tips of her breasts, playfully nibbled her earlobes and soon the strangeness started, the buzzing and the rush of air, and we began to detect one another's heartbeats and pulse.

"Oh," she said. "Oh, one feels so peculiar!" But it did not frighten her. Our souls drifted together and were fused in the clear white light coming from the Center of All Things. And I discovered what it is like to wriggle one's shoulders and have heavy breasts slap to-

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gether and I felt eggs throbbing and impatient in my ovaries. At the height of our voyage we joined our bodies. I felt myself moving against myself, I felt lips on my lips, tongue on my tongue, soul in my soul. This union of our bodies endured for hours, or so it seemed. And in that time my self was open to her, so that she could see in it all she chose, my boyhood in Salla, my flight to Glin, my marriage, my love for my bondsister, my weaknesses, my self-deceptions, and I looked into her and saw the sweetness of her, the giddiness, the moment of first finding blood on her thighs, the other blood of a later time, the image of Kinnall Darival as she carried it in her mind, the vague and unformed commandments of the Covenant and all the rest of her soul's furniture. Then we were swept away by the storms of our senses. I felt her orgasm and mine, mine and mine, hers and hers, the double column of frenzy and that was one, the rise and the fall. We lay sweaty and sticky and exhausted, the drug still thundering through our joined minds. I opened my eyes and saw hers unfocused, the pupils dilated. She gave me a lopsided smile.

"I—I—I—I—I," she said. "I!" The wonder of it dazed her.

"I! I! I!" I planted a kiss between her breasts and felt the brush of my lips myself. "I love you," I said.

THERE was a clerk in the Port Justiciary, a certain Ulman, half my age and clearly a man of promise, whom I had come to like. He knew my power and my ancestry and showed no awe of me over that; his respect for me was based entirely on my skills in evaluating and handling the problems of the Justiciary. I kept him late one day and called him into my office when the others were gone. "There is this drug of Sumara Borthan," I said, "that allows one mind freely to enter another." He smiled and said that he had heard of it, yes, but understood it was difficult to obtain and dangerous to use. "There is no danger," I answered. "And as for the difficulty of obtaining it—" I drew forth one of my little packets. His smile did not fade, though dots of color came into his cheeks. We took the drug together in my office. Hours later, when we left for our homes, I gave him some so that he could take it with his wife.

IN THE Stone Chapel I dared to reach out to a stranger, a short, thickbodied man in princely clothes, possibly a member of the septarch's family. He had the clear serene eyes of a man of good faith and the poise of one who has looked within himself and is not displeased by what he has seen. But when I spoke my words to him he shoved me away and cursed me

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with such fury that his anger became contagious; maddened by his words, I nearly struck him in blind frenzy. *"Selfbarer! Selfbarer!"* The shout echoed through the holy building, and people emerged from rooms of meditation to stare. It was the worst shame I had known in years. My exalted mission came into another perspective: I saw it as filthy and myself as something pitiful, a creeping slinking fog of a man driven by who knew what compulsion to expose his shabby soul to strangers. My anger drained from me and fear flowed in: I slipped into the shadows and out by a side door, dreading arrest. For a week I walked on tiptoe, forever looking back over my shoulder. But nothing pursued me except my panging conscience.

THE time of insecurity passed. Again I saw my mission whole, recognized the merit of what I had pledged myself to do and felt only sorrow for the man in the Stone Chapel who had spurned my gift. And in a single week I found three strangers who would share the drug with me. I wondered how I ever could have doubted myself. But other seasons of doubt lay ahead.

I TRIED to arrive at a theoretical basis for my use of the drug, to construct a new theology of love and openness. I studied the Covenant and many of its commentaries, attempting to discover why the first settlers of Velada Borthan had found it necessary to deify mistrust and concealment. What did they fear? What were they hoping to preserve? Dark men in a dark time, with mindsnakes creeping through their skulls. In the end I came to no real understanding of them. They were convinced of their own virtue. They had acted for the best. Thou shalt not thrust the inwardness of thy soul upon thy fellow man. Thou shalt not unduly examine needs of thine own self. Thou shalt deny thyself the easy pleasures of intimate conversation. Thou shalt stand alone before thy gods. And so we had lived, these hundreds of years, unquestioning, obedient, keeping the Covenant. Maybe nothing keeps the Covenant alive now, for most of us, except simple politeness: we are unwilling to embarrass others by baring ourselves and so we go locked up, our inner wounds festering, and we speak our language of third-person courtliness. Was it time to create a new Covenant? A bond of love, a testament of sharing? Hidden in my rooms at home, I struggled to write one. What could I say that would be believed? That we had done well enough following the old ways, but

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at grievous personal cost. That the perilous conditions of the first settling no longer obtained among us and certain customs, having become handicaps rather than assets, could be discarded. That societies must evolve if they are not to decay. That love is better than hate and trust is better than mistrust. But little of what I wrote convinced even me. Why was I attacking the established order of things? Out of profound conviction, or merely out of the hunger for dirty pleasures? I was a man of my own time; I was embedded firmly in the rock of my upbringing even as I toiled to turn that rock to sand. Trapped in the tension between my old beliefs and my still unformed new ones, I swung a thousand times a day from pole to pole, from shame to exaltation. As I labored over the draft of my new Covenant's preamble one evening, my bondsister Halum unexpectedly entered my study.

"What are you writing?" she asked pleasantly.

I covered one sheet with another. My face must have reflected my discomfort, for hers showed signs of apology for having intruded.

"Official reports," I said. "Foolishness. Dull bureaucratic trivia."

That night I burned all I had written, in a paroxysm of self-contempt.

IN THOSE weeks I took many voyages of exploration into unknown lands. Friends, strangers, casual acquaintances, a mistress: companions on strange journeys. But through all the early phase of my time of changes I said not a word to Halum about the drug. To share it with her had been my original goal, that had brought the drug to my lips in the first place. Yet I feared to approach her. It was cowardice that kept me back: what if, by coming to know me too well, she ceased to love me?

SEVERAL times I came close to broaching the subject with her. I held myself back. I did not dare to move toward her. If you wish you may measure my sincerity by my hesitation; how pure, you may ask, was my new creed of openness if I felt that my bondsister would be above such a communion? But I will not pretend there was any consistency in my thinking then. My liberation from the taboos on self-baring was a willed thing, not a natural evolution, and I had constantly to battle against the old habits of our custom. Though I talked in "I" and "me" with Schweiz and some of the others with whom I had shared the drug, I was never comfortable in doing so. Vestiges of my broken bonds still crept together to shackle me. I looked at Halum and knew that I loved her

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and told myself that the only way to fulfill that love was through the joining of her soul and mine—and in my hand was the powder that would join us. And I did not dare. And I did not dare.

XVII

THE twelfth person with whom I shared the Sumaran drug was my bondbrother Noim. He was in Manneran to spend a week as my guest. Winter had come, bringing snow to Glin, hard rains to Salla and only fog to Manneran—northerners needed a little prodding to come to our warm province. I had not seen Noim since the summer before, when we had hunted together in the Huishtors. In this past year we had drifted apart somewhat; in a sense Schweiz had come to take Noim's place in my life and I no longer had quite the same need for my bondbrother.

Noim now was a wealthy landowner in Salla, having come into the inheritance of the Condorit family as well as the lands of his wife's kin. In manhood he had become plump, though not fat; his wit and cunning were not hidden deep beneath his new layers of flesh. He had a sleek, well-oiled look, with dark unblemished skin, full complacent lips and round sardonic eyes. Little escaped his attention. Upon arriving at my house he surveyed me with great care, as though counting my teeth and the lines about my eyes and, after the formal bondbrotherly greetings. after the presentation of my gift and the one he had brought from Stirron, after we had signed the contract of host and guest, Noim said unexpectedly, "Are you in trouble, Kinnall?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Your face is sharper. You've lost weight. Your mouth—you hold it in a quirky grin that doesn't announce a relaxed man within. Your eyes are red-rimmed and they don't want to look directly into other eyes. Is anything wrong?"

"These have been the happiest months of one's life," I said, a shade too vehemently, perhaps.

Noim ignored my disclaimer. "Are you having problems with Loimel?"

"She goes her way and one goes his own."

"Difficulties with the business of the Justiciary, then?"

"Please, Noim, won't you believe that—"

"Your face has changes inscribed in it," he said. "Do you deny there have been changes in your life?"

I shrugged. "And if so?"

"Changes for the worse?"

"One does not think so."

"You're being evasive, Kinnall. Come: what's a bondbrother for if not to share problems?"

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"There are no problems," I insisted.

"Very well." And he let the matter drop. But I saw him watching me that evening and again the next day at morning's meal, studying me, probing me. I could never hide anything from him. We sat over blue wine and talked of the Sallan harvest, talked of Stirron's new program of reforming the tax structure, talked of the renewed tensions between Salla and Glin, the bloody border raids that had lately cost me the life of a sister. And all the while Noim watched me. Halum dined with us, we talked of our childhood—and Noim watched me. He flirted with Loimel, but his eyes did not wander from me. The depth and intensity of his concern preyed on me. He would be asking questions of others, soon, trying to get from Halum or from Loimel some notion of what might be bothering me, and he might stir up troublesome curiosities in them that way. I could not let him remain ignorant of the central experience of his bondbrother's life. Late the second night, when everyone else had retired, I took Noim to my study, opened the secret place where I stored the white powder and asked him if he knew anything of the Sumaran drug. He claimed not to have heard of it. Briefly I described its effects to him. His expression darkened; he seemed to draw in on himself. "Do you use this stuff often?" he asked.

"Eleven times thus far."

"Eleven—*why*, Kinnall?"

"To learn the nature of one's own self, through sharing that self with others."

Noim laughed explosively: it was almost a snort. "Selfbaring, Kinnall?"

"One takes up odd hobbies in one's middle years."

"And with whom have you played this game?"

I said, "Their names don't matter. No one you would know. People of Manneran, those with some adventure in their souls, those who are willing to take risks."

"Loimel?"

Now it was my turn to snort. "Never! She knows nothing of this at all."

"Halum, then?"

I shook my head. "One wishes one had the courage to approach Halum. So far one has concealed everything from her. One fears she's too virginal, too easily shocked. It's sad, isn't it, Noim, when one has to hide something as exciting as this, as wonderfully rewarding, from one's bondsister."

"From one's bondbrother too," he observed testily.

"You would have been told in time," I said. "You would have been offered your chance to experience the communion."

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His eyes flashed. "Do you think I'd want it?"

His deliberate obscenity earned only a faint smile from me. "One hopes one's bondbrother will share all of one's experiences. At present the drug opens a gulf between us. One has gone again and again to a place you have never visited. Do you see, Noim?"

NOIM saw. He was tempted; he hovered at the edge of the abyss; he chewed his lips, tugged at his earlobes and everything that passed across his mind was as transparent to me as if we had already shared the Sumaran powder. For my sake he was uneasy, knowing that I had seriously strayed from the Covenant and might soon find myself in grave spiritual and legal trouble. For his own sake he was gnawed by curiosity, aware that selfbaring with one's bondbrother was no great sin and half-eager to know the kind of communion he might have with me under the drug. Also his eyes revealed a glint of jealousy that I had bared myself to this one and this one and that—unimportant strangers—and not to him. I tell you that I comprehended these things at that moment, though I confirmed them later when Noim's soul was open to me.

We said nothing to one another about these matters for several days. We visited with Schweiz, emptied many a flask of good wine and discussed religious topics in a hearty, earnest, drunken way. ("All my life," said Schweiz, "has been a quest for plausible reasons to believe in what I know to be irrational.") Noim noticed that Schweiz did not always observe the grammatical niceties. Another night we dined with a group of Mannerangi nobles in a voluptuous house in the hills overlooking the city: small birdlike men, overdressed and fidgety, with huge, handsome young wives. Noim was displeased by these effete dukes and barons, with their talk of commerce and jewelry, but he grew more irritable yet when the chatter turned to the rumor that a mind-unsealing drug from the southern continent was now procurable in the capital. To this I made only polite interjections of surprise; Noim glared at me for my hypocrisy and even refused a dish of tender Mannerangi brandy, so tight-strung were his nerves.

A sizzling tension was building in Noim during these days, for he clearly longed to return to the subject of our early conversation, yet could not bring himself to it. I made no move toward reopening the theme. It was Noim who made the move, finally, on the eve of his departure for his home in Salla.

"This drug of yours—" he began hoarsely.

He said he felt he could not

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regard himself as my true bondbrother unless he sampled it. These words came from him at great cost. His elegant clothes were rumpled by his restlessness and a fine line of beaded perspiration stood out on his upper lip. We went to a room where no one could intrude and I prepared the potion. As he took the flask he briefly flashed at me his familiar grin, impudent and sly and bold, but his hand was shaking so badly he nearly spilled the drink.

The drug took effect quickly for both of us. It was a night of thick humidity. A dense greasy mist covered the city and its suburbs and it seemed to me that fingers of it were sliding into our room through the partly opened window: I saw shimmering, pulsating strands of cloud groping at us, dancing between my bondbrother and myself. The early sensations of druggedness disturbed Noim, until I explained that everything was normal, the twinned heartbeats, the cottony head, the high whining sounds in the air. Now we were open. I looked into Noim and saw not only his self but his image of his self, encrusted with shame and self-contempt; there was in Noim a fierce and burning loathing of his imagined flaws—and the flaws were many. He held himself accused of laziness, lack of discipline and ambition, irreligiousness, a casual concern with high obligations and physical and moral weakness. Why he saw himself in this way I could not understand, for the true Noim was there beside the image and the true Noim was a tough-minded man, loyal to those he loved, harsh in judgment of folly, clear-sighted, passionate, energetic. The contrast between Noim's Noim and the world's was startling: it was as though he were capable of correctly evaluating everything but his own worth. I had seen such disparities before on these drug voyages; in fact they were universal in all but Schweiz, who had not been trained from childhood in self-denial; yet they were sharper in Noim than in anyone else.

Also I saw, as I had seen before, my own image refracted through Noim's sensibility: a far nobler Kinnall Darival than I recognized. How he idealized me! I was all he hoped to be, a man of action and valor, a wielder of power, an enemy of everything that was frivolous, a practitioner of the sternest inner discipline and devotion. Yet this image bore traces of a new overlay of tarnish, for was I not also now a Covenant-defiling selfbarer, who had done this and this and that and that with eleven strangers and who now had lured his own bondbrother into criminal experimentation? Noim also found in me the true

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depth of my feelings for Halum and upon making that discovery, which confirmed old suspicions, he altered his image of me once again, not for the better. Meanwhile I showed Noim how I had always seen him—quick, clever, capable—and showed him, too, his own Noim and the objective Noim as well, while he gave me a view of the selves of mine he now could see beside that idealized Kinnall. These mutual explorations continued a long time. I thought the exchanges were immensely valuable, since only with Noim could I attain the necessary depth of perspective, the proper parállax of character, and he only with me; we had great advantages over a pair of strangers meeting for the first time by way of the Sumaran drug. When the spell of the potion began to lift, I felt myself exhausted by the intensity of our communion, yet ennobled, exalted, transformed.

Not so Noim. He looked depleted and chilled. He could barely lift his eyes to mine. His mood was so frigid that I dared not break in on it but remained still, waiting for him to recover.

At length he asked, "Is it all over?"

"Yes."

"Promise one thing, Kinnall. Will you promise?"

"Say it, Noim."

"That you never do this thing with Halum! Is it a promise? Will you promise it, Kinnall? Never. Never. Never."

SEVERAL days after Noim's departure some guilty impulse drove me to the Stone Chapel. To fill the time until Jidd could see me, I roamed the halls and byways of the dark building, pausing at altars, bowing humbly to half-blind scholars of the Covenant holding debate in a courtyard, brushing away ambitious minor drainers who, recognizing me, solicited my trade. All about me were the things of the gods, and I failed to detect the divine presence. Perhaps Schweiz had found the godhood through the souls of other men, but I, dabbling in self-baring, somehow had lost that other faith and it did not matter to me. I knew that in time I would find my way back to grace under this new dispensation of love and trust that I hoped to offer. So I lurked in the godhouse of godhouses, a mere tourist.

I went to Jidd. I had not had a draining since immediately after Schweiz first had given me the Sumaran drug. The little crooknosed man remarked on that as I took the contract from him. The pressures of the Justiciary, I explained, and he shook his head and made a chiding sound. "You must be full to overflowing," Jidd said. I did not

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reply, but settled down before his mirror to peer at the lean, unfamiliar face that dwelled in it. He asked me which god I would have and I told him the god of the innocent. He gave me a queer look at that. The holy lights came on. With soft words he guided me into the half-trance of confession. What could I say? That I had ignored my pledge and gone on to use the selfbaring potion with everyone who would take it from me? I sat silent. Jidd prodded me. He did something I had never known a drainer to do before: hearkened back to a previous draining and asked me to speak again of this drug whose use I had admitted earlier. Had I used it again? I pushed my face close to the mirror, fogging it with my breath. Yes. Yes. One is a miserable sinner and one has been weak once more. Then Jidd asked me how I had obtained this drug and I said that I had taken it, the first time, in company with one who had purchased it from a man who had been to Sumara Borthan. Yes, Jidd said, and what was the name of this companion? That was a clumsy move: immediately I was on guard. It seemed to me that Jidd's question went far beyond the needs of a draining. I refused therefore to give him Schweiz' name, which led the drainer to ask me, a little roughly, if I feared he would breach the secrecy of the ritual.

Did I fear that? On rare occasions I had held things back from drainers out of shame, but never out of fear of betrayal. Naive I was and I had full faith in the ethics of the godhouse. Only now, suddenly suspicious, the suspicion having been planted by Jidd himself, did I mistrust Jidd and all his tribe. Why did he want to know? What information was he after? What could I gain, or he, by my revealing my source of the drug?

I replied tautly, "One seeks forgiveness for oneself alone and how can telling the name of one's companion bring that. Let him to his own confessing." But of course there was no chance that Schweiz would go to a drainer; thus I had come down to playing word games with Jidd. All value had leaked from this draining, leaving me with an empty husk.

"If you would have peace from the gods," Jidd said, "you must speak your soul fully."

How could I do that? Confess the seduction of eleven people into selfbaring? I had no need of Jidd's forgiveness. I had no faith in his good will. Abruptly I stood up, a little dizzy from kneeling in the dark, swaying a bit, almost stumbling.

"One is not ready for draining today," I told Jidd. "One must examine one's soul more closely." I lurched toward the door. He looked in a puzzled manner at the

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money I had given him.

"The fee?" he called. I told him he could keep it.

THE days became mere vacant rooms, separating one journey with the drug from the next. I drifted idle and detached through all my responsibilities, seeing nothing of what was around me, living only for my next communion. The real world dissolved; I lost interest in sex, wine, food, the doings of the Port Justiciary, the friction between neighboring provinces of Velada Borthan and all other such things, which to me now were only the shadows of shadows. Possibly I was using the drug too frequently. I lost weight and existed in a perpetual haze of blurred white light. I had difficulties in sleeping and for hours found myself twisting and shifting, a blanket of muggy tropical air clamping me to my mattress, a haggard insomniac with an ache in his eyeballs and grittiness under the lids. I walked tired through my days and blinking through my evenings. Rarely did I speak with Loimel, nor did I touch her, and hardly ever did I touch any other woman. I fell asleep at midday once while lunching with Halum. I scandalized High Justice Kalimol by replying to one of his questions with the phrase, "It seems to me—" Old Segvord Helalam told me I looked ill and suggested I go hunting with my sons in the Burnt Lowlands. Nevertheless the drug had the power of bringing me alive. I sought out new sharers and found it ever more easy to make contact with them, for often now they were brought to me by those who had already made the inner voyage. An odd group they were: two dukes, a marquis, a whore, a keeper of the royal archives, a sea captain in from Glin, a septarch's mistress, a director of the Commercial and Seafarer's Bank of Manneran, a poet, a lawyer from Velis here to confer with Captain Khrisch, and many more. The circle of self-barers was widening. My supply of the drug was nearly consumed, but now there was talk among some of my new friends of outfitting a new expedition to Sumara Borthan. There were fifty of us by this time. Change was becoming infectious; there was an epidemic of it in Manneran.

SOMETIMES, unexpectedly, in the blank dead time between one communion and another, I underwent a strange confusion of the self. A block of borrowed experience that I had stowed in the dark depths of my mind might break loose and float up into the higher levels of consciousness, intruding itself into my own identity. I remained aware of being Kinnall Darival, the septarch's son of

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Salla, yet there was suddenly among my memories a segment of the self of Noim, or Schweiz, or one of the Sumarnu, or someone else of those with whom I had shared the drug. For the length of that splicing of selves—a moment, an hour, half a day—I walked about unsure of my past, unable to determine whether some event fresh in my mind had really befallen me or had come to me through the drug. This was disturbing but not really frightening, except the first two or three times. Eventually I learned to distinguish the quality of these unearned memories from that of my genuine past through familiarity with the textures of each. The drug had made me many people, I realized. Was it not better to be many than to be something less than one?

XVIII

IN EARLY spring a lunatic heat settled over Manneran, coupled with such frequent rains that all the city's vegetation went mad and would have swallowed every street if not given a daily hacking. It was green, green, green, everywhere: green haze in the sky, green rain falling, green sunlight sometimes breaking through, broad glossy green leaves unfurling on every balcony and in every garden plot. A man's own soul can mildew in that. Green, too, were the awnings on the street of the spice-merchants' shops. Loimel had given me a long list of things to purchase, delicacies from Threish and Velis and the Wet Lowlands and in a docile husbandly way I went to obtain them, since the street of spice was only a short walk from the Justiciary. She was mounting a grand feast to celebrate the Naming Day of our eldest daughter, who was at last going to come into the adult-name we had intended for her: Loimel. All the great ones of Manneran had been invited to look on as my wife acquired a namesake. Among the guests would be several who had covertly sampled the Sumaran drug with me and I took private pleasure in that; Schweiz, though, had not been invited, since Loimel deemed him coarse. In any event, he had left Manneran on some business trip just as the weather was beginning to go berserk.

I moved through the greenness to the best of the shops. A recent rain had ended and the sky was a flat green plaque resting on the rooftops. To me came delicious fragrances, sweetnesses, pungencies, clouds of tongue-tickling flavors. Abruptly there were black bubbles coursing through my skull and for a moment I was Schweiz haggling on a pier with a skipper who had just brought a cargo of costly produce in from the Gulf of Sumar. I halted to enjoy this

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tangling of selves. Schweiz faded; through Noim's mind I smelled the scent of newly threshed hay on the Condorit estates, under a delicious latesummer sun. As I stood gaping outside the spice-shop, a thin hand fell on mine and a guarded voice said, "I must talk to you secretly, Kinnall." *I.* The word jolted me from my dreaming.

Androg Mihan, keeper of the archives of Manneran's prime septarch, stood beside me. He was a small man, sharp-featured and gray, the last you would think to seek illegal pleasures; the Duke of Sumar, one of my early conquests, had led him to me. "Where shall we go?" I asked and Mihan indicated a disreputable-looking lower-class godhouse across the street.

Its drainer lounged outside, trying to stir up business. I could not see how we could talk secretly in a godhouse, but I followed the archivist anyway; we entered the godhouse and Mihan told the drainer to fetch his contract forms. The moment the man was gone, Mihan leaned close to me and said, "The police are on their way to your house. When you return home this evening you will be arrested and taken to prison on one of the Sumar Gulf's isles."

"Where do you learn this?"

"The decree was verified this morning and has passed to me for filing."

"What charge?" I asked.

"Selfbaring," Mihan said. "Accusation filed by agents of the Stone Chapel. There is also a secular charge: use and distribution of illegal drugs. They have you, Kinnall."

"Who is the informer?"

"A certain Jidd, said to be a drainer in the Stone Chapel. Did you let the tale of the drug be drained from you?"

"I did. In my innocence. The sanctity of the godhouse—"

"The sanctity of the dunghouse," Androg Mihan said vehemently. "Now you must flee! The full force of the government is mustered against you."

"Where shall I go?"

"The Duke of Sumar will shelter you tonight," said Mihan. "After that—I do not know."

The drainer now returned, bearing a set of contracts. He gave us a proprietary smile and said, "Well, gentlemen, which of you is to be first?"

"One has remembered another appointment," Mihan said.

"One feels suddenly unwell," I said.

I tossed the startled drainer a fat coin and we left the godhouse. Outside, Mihan pretended not to know me and we went our separate ways without a word. Not for a moment did I doubt the truth of his warning. I had to take flight; Loimel would have to purchase

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her own spices. I hailed a car and went at once to the mansion of the Duke of Sumar.

THIS duke is one of the wealthiest in Manneran, with sprawling estates along the gulf and in the Huishtor foothills and a splendid home at the capital set amid a park worthy of an emperor's palace. He is hereditary customs-keeper of Stroin Gap, which is the source of his family's opulence, since for centuries they have skimmed a share of all that is brought forth to market out of the Wet Lowlands. In his person this duke is a man of great ugliness or remarkable beauty, I am not sure which: he has a large flat triangular head, thin lips, a powerful nose and strange dense tightly curled hair that clings like a carpet to his skull. His hair is entirely white, yet his face is unlined. His eyes are huge and dark and intense. His cheeks are hollow. It is an ascetic face, which to me always seemed alternately saintly and monstrous and sometimes the both at once. I had been close with him almost since my arrival in Manneran so many years before; he had helped Segvord Helalam into power and he had stood soulbinder to Loimel at our wedding ceremony. When I took up the use of the Sumaran drug, he divined it as if by telepathy. In a conversation of marvelous subtlety he learned from me that I had the drug and arranged that he should take it with me. That had been four moonrises earlier, in late winter.

Arriving at his home, I found a tense conference in progress. Present were most of the men of consequence whom I had inveigled into my circle of self-barers. The Duke of Mannerangu Smor. The Marquis of Woyn. The bank director. The Commissioner of the Treasury and his brother, the Procurator-General of Manneran. The Master of the Border. And five or six others of similar significance. Archivist Mihan arrived shortly after I did.

"We are all here now," the Duke of Mannerangu Smor said. "They could sweep us up with a single stroke. Are the grounds well guarded?"

"No one will invade us," said the Duke of Sumar, a trifle icily, clearly offended by the suggestion that common police might burst into his home. He turned his huge alien eyes on me. "Kinnall, this will be your last night in Manneran, and no help for it. You are to be the scapegoat."

"By whose choice?" I asked.

"Not ours," the duke replied. He explained that something close to a coup d'etat had been attempted in Manneran this day and might well yet succeed: a revolt of junior bureaucrats against their mas-

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ters. The beginning, he said, lay in my having admitted my use of the Sumaran drug to the drainer Jidd. (Around the room faces darkened. The unspoken implication was that I had been a fool to trust a drainer and now must pay the price of my folly, I had not been as sophisticated as these men.) Jidd, it seemed, had leagued himself with a cabal of disaffected minor officials, hungry for their turn at power. Since he was drainer to most of the great men of Mannerran, he was in an extraordinarily good position to aid the ambitious, by betraying the secrets of the mighty. Why Jidd had chosen to contravene his oaths in this fashion was not yet known. The Duke of Sumar suspected that in Jidd familiarity had bred contempt and, after listening for years to the melancholy outpourings of his powerful clients, he had grown to loathe them: exasperated by their confessions, he found pleasure in collaborating in their destruction. (This gave me a new view of what a drainer's soul might be like.) Hence Jidd had, for some months now, been slipping useful facts to rapacious subordinates, who had threatened their masters with them, often to considerable effect. By admitting my use of the drug to him, I had made myself vulnerable, and he had sold me to certain folk of the Justiciary wishing me out of office.

"But this is absurd!" I cried. "The only evidence against me is protected by the sanctity of the godhouse! How can Jidd place a complaint against me based on what I've drained to him? I'll have him up on charges for violation of contract!"

"There is other evidence," the Marquis of Woyn said sadly.

"There is?"

"Using what he heard from your own lips," the Marquis said, "Jidd was able to guide your enemies into channels of investigation. They have found a certain woman who lives in the hovels behind the Stone Chapel, who had admitted to them that you gave her a strange drink that opened her mind to you—"

"The beasts."

"They have also," the Duke of Sumar said, "been able to link several of us to you. Not all, but several. This morning some of us were presented, by their own subordinates, by demands to resign their offices or face exposure. We met these threats firmly and those who made them are now under detention, but there is no telling how many allies they have in high places. It is possible that by next moonrise we will all have been cast down and new men will hold our power. However, I doubt this, since, so far as we can determine, the only solid evidence so far is the confession of the slut, who has

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implicated only you, Kinnall. The accusations made by Jidd will of course be inadmissible, though they can do damage anyway."

"We can destroy her credibility," I said. "I'll claim I never knew her. I—"

"Too late," said the Procurator-General. "Her deposition is on record. I've had a copy from the Grand Justiciar. It will stand up. You're hopelessly implicated."

"What will happen?" I asked.

"We will crush the ambitions of the blackmailers," said the Duke of Sumar, "and send them into poverty. We will break Jidd's prestige and drive him from the Stone Chapel. We will deny all of the charges of selfbaring that may be brought against us. You, however, must leave Manneran."

"Why?" I looked at the duke in perplexity. "I'm not without influence. If you can withstand the charges, why not I?"

"Your guilt is on record," the Duke of Mannerangu Smor said. "If you flee, it can be claimed that you alone—and this girl you corrupted—were the only ones involved and that the rest is merely the fabrication of self-serving underlings trying to overthrow their masters. If you stay and try to fight a hopeless case, you'll eventually bring us all down."

It was wholly plain to me now.

I was dangerous to them. My strength might be broken in court and their guilt thus exposed. Thus far I was the only one indicted, and I was the only one vulnerable to the processes of Mannerangi justice. They were vulnerable solely through me, and if I went, there was no way to getting at them. The safety of the majority required my departure. Moreover: my naive faith in the godhouse, which had led me rashly to confess to Jidd, had led to this tempest, which otherwise might have been avoided. I had caused all this; I was the one who must go.

The Duke of Sumar said, "You will remain with us until the dark hours of the night. Then my private groundcar, escorted by bodyguards as though I myself were traveling, will take you to the estate of the Marquis of Woyn. A riverboat will be waiting there. By dawn you will be across the Woyn and into your homeland of Salla—and may the gods journey at your side."

ONCE more a refugee. All the power I had accumulated in fifteen years in Manneran was lost in a single day. Neither high birth nor high connections could save me: I might have ties of marriage or love or politics to half the masters of Manneran, yet they were helpless to help me. I have made it seem as if they had forced me into exile to save their own

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skins, but it was not like that. My going was necessary and it brought as much sorrow to them as to me. The others had taken the drug, had adapted to the changes and now would be enhanced and transformed by it. And not injured. Not so with me. With me the drug had opened the doors of ruin. Why? Why? Some flaw in my fate, I suppose. Some darkness of my destiny. That I, a septarch's son, should have taken up a creed of selfbaring—well, perhaps that demanded my downfall and not that of these other high ones. I have no idea. There is little justice.

I had nothing with me but the clothes I wore. My wardrobe, my weapons, my ornaments, my wealth itself, must remain behind in Manneran. As a boy-prince fleeing from Salla to Glin, I had had the prudence to transfer funds ahead of myself, but now I was cut off. My assets would be sequestered; my sons would be paupered. There had been no time for preparations.

Here at least my friends were of service. The Procurator-General, who was nearly of a size with me, had brought several changes of handsome clothing. The Commissioner of the Treasury had obtained for me a fair fortune in Sallan currency. The Duke of Mannerangu Smor pulled two rings and a pendant from his own body, that I should not go unadorned into my native province. The Marquis of Woyn pressed on me a ceremonial dagger and his heat-rod, with a hilt worked with precious gems. Mihan promised to speak with Segvord Helalam and tell him the details of my downfall; Segvord would be sympathetic, Mihan believed, and would protect my sons with all his influence and keep them untainted by their father's indictment. Lastly, the Duke of Sumar came to me at the deepest time of the night—when I sat alone sourly eating the dinner I had had no time for earlier—and handed my a small jeweled case of bright gold, of the sort one might carry medicine in. "Open it carefully," he said. I did and found it brimming with white powder. In amazement I asked him where he had obtained this; he had lately sent agents secretly to Sumara Borthan, he replied, who had returned with a small supply of the drug. He claimed to have more, but I believe he gave me all he had.

"In an hour's time you will leave," said the duke, to smother my gush of gratitude.

I asked to be allowed to make a call first.

"Segvord will explain matters to your wife," the duke said.

"One did not mean one's wife. One meant one's bondsister." In speaking of Halum I could not drop easily into the rough gram-

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mar we selfbarers affected. "One has had no chance to make one's farewell to her."

The duke understood my anguish, for her had been within my soul. But he would not grant me the call. Lines might be tapped; he could not risk having my voice go forth from his home this night. I realized then how delicate a position even he must be in and I did not force the issue. I could call Halum tomorrow, when I had crossed the Woyn and was safe in Salla.

Shortly it was time for me to depart. My friends had already gone some hours since; the duke alone led me from the house. His magestic groundcar waited, and a corps of bodyguards on individual powercycles. The duke embraced me. I climbed into the car and settled back against the cushions. The driver opaqued the windows, hiding me from view, though not interfering with my own vision. The car rolled silently forward, picked up speed, plunged into the night, with my outriders, six of them, hovering about it like insects. It seemed that hours went by before we came even to the main gate of the duke's estate. Then we were on the highway. I sat like a man carved of ice, scarcely thinking of what had befallen me. Northward lay our route and we went at such a rate that the sun was not yet up when we reached the margin of the Marquis of Woyn's estate, on the border between Manneran and Salla. The gate opened; we shot through; the road cut across a dense forest in which, by moonlight, I could see sinister parasitic growths like hairy ropes tangling tree to tree. Suddenly we erupted into a clearing and I beheld the banks of the River Woyn. The car halted.

Someone in dark robes helped me out, as though I were a dodderer, and escorted me down the spongy bank to a long narrow pier, barely visible in the thick mist rising off the breast of the river. A boat was tied up, no great craft, hardly more than a dinghy. Yet it traveled at great speeds across the broad and turbulent Woyn. Still I felt no inner response to my banishment from Manneran. I was like one who has gone forth in battle and had his right leg sliced off at the thigh by a fire-bold, and who now lies in a tumbled heap, staring calmly at his stump and sensing no pain. The pain would come in time.

Dawn was near. I could make out the shape of the Sallan side of the river. We pulled up at a dock that jutted out of a grassy bank, plainly some nobleman's private landing. Now I felt my first alarm. In a moment I would step ashore in Salla. Where would I find myself? How would I reach some settled region? I was no boy, to

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beg rides from passing trucks. But all this had been settled for me hours before. As the boat bumped the shoulder of the pier a figure emerged in the dimness and extended a hand: Noim. He drew me forth and clasped me in a tight hug. "I know what has happened," he said. "You will stay with me." In his emotion he abandoned polite usage with me for the first time since our boyhood.

XIX

AT MIDDAY, from Noim's estate in southwestern Salla, I phoned the Duke of Sumar to confirm my safe arrival—it was he, of course, who had arranged for my bondbrother to meet me at the border—and then I put through a call to Halum. Segvord had told her just a few hours earlier of the reasons for my disappearance. "How strange this news is," she said. "You never spoke of the drug. Yet it was so important to you, for you risked everything to use it. How could it have had such a role in your life and yet be kept a secret from your bondsister?" I answered that I had not dared to let her know of my preoccupation with it, for fear I might be tempted to offer it to her. She said, "Is opening yourself then to your bondsister so terrible a sin?"

Noim treated me with every courtesy, indicating that I could stay with him as long as I wished—weeks, months, even years. Presumably my friends in Manneran would succeed eventually in freeing some of my assets and I would buy land in Salla and take up the life of a country baron; or perhaps Segvord and the Duke of Sumar and other men of influence would have my indictment quashed, so that I could return to the southern province. Until then, Noim told me, his home was mine. But I detected a subtle coolness in his dealings with me, as if this hospitality were offered merely out of respect for our bonding. Only after some days did the source of his remoteness reach the surface. Sitting late past dinner in his great white-washed feasting hall, we were talking of childhood days—our main theme of conversation, far safer than any talk of recent events—when Noim suddenly said, "Is that drug of yours known to give people nightmares?"

"One has heard of no such cases, Noim."

"Here's a case, then. One who woke up drenched with chilly sweat night after night for weeks after we shared the drug in Manneran. One thought one would lose one's mind."

"What kind of dreams?" I asked.

"Ugly things. Monsters. Teeth.

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Claws. A sense of not knowing who one is. Pieces of other minds floating through one's own." He gulped at his wine. "You take the drug for *pleasure*, Kinnall?"

"For knowledge."

"Knowledge of what?"

"Knowledge of self and knowledge of others."

"One prefers ignorance, then." He shivered. "You know, Kinnall, one was never a particularly reverent person. One blasphemed, one stuck his tongue out at drainers, one laughed at the godtales they told, yes? You've nearly converted one into a man of faith with that stuff. The terror of opening one's mind—of knowing that one has no defenses, that another can slide right into one's soul and is doing it—it's impossible to take."

"Impossible for you," I said. "Others cherish it."

"One leans toward the Covenant," said Noim. "Privacy is sacred. One's soul is one's own. There's a dirty pleasure in baring it."

"Not baring. Sharing."

"Does it sound prettier that way? Very well: there's a dirty pleasure in sharing it, Kinnall. Even though we are bondbrothers, one came away from you last time feeling soiled. Sand and grit in the soul. Is this what you want for everyone? To make us all feel filthy with guilt?"

"There need be no guilt, Noim. One gives, one receives, one comes forth better than one was—"

"Dirtier."

"Enlarged. Enhanced. More compassionate. Speak to others who have tried it," I said.

"Of course. As they come streaming out of Manneran, landless refugees, one will question them about the beauty and wonder of selfbaring. Excuse me: self-sharing."

I saw the torment in his eyes. He wanted still to love me, but the Sumaran drug had shown him things—about himself, perhaps about me—that made him hate the one who had given the drug to him. He was one for whom walls are necessary; I had not realized that. What had I done—to turn my bondbrother into my enemy? Perhaps if we could take the drug a second time I might make things more clear to him—but no, no hope of that. Noim was frightened by inwardness. I had transformed my blaspheming bondbrother into a man of the Covenant. There was nothing I could say to him now.

After some silence he said, "One must make a request of you, Kinnall."

"Anything."

"One hesitates to place boundaries on a guest. But if you have brought any of this drug with you from Manneran, Kinnall, if you hide it somewhere in your

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rooms—get rid of it, is that understood? There must be none of it in this house. Get rid of it, Kinnall."

Never in my life had I lied to my bondbrother. Never.

With the jeweled case the Duke of Sumar had given me blazing against my breastbone I said solemnly to Noim, "You have nothing to fear on that account, Noim."

NOT many days later the news of my disgrace became public in Manneran and swiftly reached Salla. Noim showed me the accounts. I was described as the chief adviser to the High Justice of the Port and openly labeled a man of the greatest authority in Manneran, who, moreover, had blood ties to the prime septarchs of Salla and Glin—and yet, despite these attainments and preferments, I had fallen away from the Covenant to take up unlawful selfbaring. I had violated not merely propriety and etiquette, but also the laws of Manneran, through my use of a certain proscribed drug from Sumara Borthan that dissolves the god-given barriers between soul and soul. Through abuse of my high office, it was said, I had engineered a secret voyage to the southern continent (poor Captain Khrisch! Had he been arrested too?) and had returned with a large quantity of the drug, which I had devilishly forced on a lowborn woman whom I was keeping; I had also circulated the foul stuff among certain prominent members of the nobility, whose names were being withheld because of their thorough repentance. On the eve of my arrest I had escaped to Salla and good riddance to me: if I attempted to return to Manneran I would immediately be apprehended. Meanwhile I would be tried in absentia and, according to the Grand Justiciar, there could be little doubt of the verdict. By way of restitution to the state for the great injury I had done the fabric of social stability, I would be required to forfeit all my lands and property, except only a portion to be set aside for the maintenance of my innocent wife and children. (Segvord Helalam, then, had at least accomplished that.) To prevent my highborn friends from transferring my assets to me in Salla before the trial, all that I possessed was already sequestered in anticipation of the Grand Justiciar's decree of guilt. Thus spake the law. Let others who would make selfbaring monsters of themselves beware!

I MADE no secret of my whereabouts in Salla, for I had no reason now to fear the jealousy of my royal brother. Stirron as a boy newly on the throne might

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have been driven to eliminate me as a potential rival, but not the Stirron who had ruled for more than seventeen years. By now he was an institution in Salla, well loved and an integral part of everyone's existence, and I was a stranger who spoke with a Mannerangi accent and who had been publicly branded with the shame of selfbaring. Even if I cared to overthrow Stirron, where would I find followers?

In truth I was hungry for the sight of my brother. In times of storm one turns to one's earliest comrades; and with Noim estranged from me and Halum on the far side of the Woyn, I had only Stirron left. I had never resented having had to flee Salla on his account, for I knew that had our ages been reversed I would have caused him to flee the same way. If our relationship had grown frosty since my flight, it was a frost of his making, arising from his guilty conscience. Years had passed since my last visit to Salla City: perhaps my adversities would open his heart. I wrote Stirron a letter from Noim's place, formally begging sanctuary in Salla. Under Sallan law I had to be taken in, for I was one of Stirron's subjects and was guilty of no crime committed on Sallan soil: yet I thought it best to ask. The charges lodged against me by the Grand Justiciar of Manneran, I admitted, were true, but I offered Stirron a terse and (I think) eloquent justification of my deviation from the Covenant. I closed the letter with expressions of my unwavering love for him and with a few reminiscences of the happy times we had had before the burdens of the septarchy had descended on him.

I expected Stirron in return to invite me to visit him at the capital, so that he could hear from my own lips an explanation of the strange things I had done in Manneran. A brotherly reunion was surely in order. But no summons to Salla City came. Each time the telephone chimed, I rushed toward it, thinking it might be Stirron calling. He did not call. Several weeks of tension and gloom passed; I hunted, I swam, I read, I tried to write my new Covenant of love. Noim remained aloof from me. His one experience at soul-sharing had thrust him into so deep an embarassment that he hardly dared to meet my eyes, for I was privy to all his innerness and that had become a wedge between us.

At last came an envelope bearing the septarch's imposing seal. It held a letter signed by Stirron, but I pray it was some steely minister and not my brother, who composed that pinch-souled message. In fewer lines than I have fingers, the septarch told me that my request for sanctuary in the province

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of Salla was granted, but only on the condition that I forswear the vices I had learned in the south. If I were caught just once spreading the use of selfbaring drugs in Salla I would be seized and driven into exile. That was all my brother had to say. Not a syllable of kindness. Not a shred of sympathy. Not an atom of warmth.

AT THE crest of the summer Halum came unexpectedly to visit us. The day of her arrival I had gone riding far out across Noim's land, following the track of a male stormshield that had burst from its pen. An accursed vanity had led Noim to acquire a clutch of these vicious furbearing manmals, though they are not native to Salla and thrive poorly there: he kept twenty or thirty of them, all claws and teeth and angry yellow eyes, and hoped to breed them into a profitable herd. I chased the escaped male through woods and plain, through morning and midday, hating it more with each hour, for it left a trail of mutilated carcasses of harmless grazing beasts. These stormshields kill for sheer love of slaughter, taking but a bite or two of flesh and abandoning the rest to scavengers. Finally I cornered it in a shadowy box-canyon. "Stun it and bring it back whole," Noim had instructed me, conscious of the animals value: but when trapped it rushed at me with such ferocity that I gave it the full beam and gladly slew it. For Noim's sake I took the trouble to strip off the precious hide. Then, weary and depressed, I rode without stopping back to the great house. A strange groundcar was parked outside and beside it stood Halum.

"You know the summers in Manneran," she explained. "One planned to go as usual to the island, but then one thought it would be good to take a holiday in Salla with Noim and Kinnall."

She had by then entered her thirtieth year. Our women marry between fourteen and sixteen, are done bearing their children by twenty-two or twenty-four and at thirty have begun to slide into middle age, but time had left Halum untouched. Not having known the tempests of marriage and the travails of motherhood, not having spent her energies on the grapplings of the conjugal couch or the lacerations of childbed, she had the supple, pliant body of a girl: no fleshy bulges, no sagging folds, no exploded veins, no thickening of the frame. She had changed only in one respect, for in recent years her dark hair had turned silvery. This was but an enhancement, however, since it gleamed with dazzling brilliance and offered agreeable contrast to the deep tan of her youthful face.

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In her luggage was a packet of letters for me from Manneran: messages from the duke, from Segvord, from my sons Noim and Stirron and Kinnall, from my daughters Halum and Loimel, from Mihan the archivist, and several others. Those who wrote did so in tense, self-conscious style. They were the letters one might write to a dead man if one felt guilty at having survived him. Still, it was good to hear these words out of my former life. I regretted not finding a letter from Schweiz; Halum told me she had heard nothing from him since before my indictment and thought he might well have left our planet. Nor was there any word from my wife. "Is Loimel too busy to write a line or two?" I asked and Halum, looking embarrassed, said softly that Loimel never spoke of me these days: "She seems to have forgotten that she was married."

Halum also had brought a trove of gifts for me from my friends across the Woyn. They were startling in their opulence: massy clusters of precious metals, elaborate strings of rare gems. "Tokens of love," Halum said, but I was not fooled. One could buy great estates with this heap of treasure. Those who loved me would not humiliate me by transferring cash to my account in Salla, but they could give me these splendors in the ordinary way of friendship, leaving me free to dispose of them according to my needs.

"Has it been very sad for you, this uprooting?" Halum asked. "This sudden going into exile?"

"One is no stranger to exile," I told her. "And one still has Noim for bondlove and companionship."

"Knowing that it would cost you what it did," she said, "would you play with the drug a second time, if you could turn time backward by a year?"

"Beyond any doubt."

"Was it worth the loss of home and family and friends?"

"It would be worth the loss of life itself," I replied, "if only one could be assured by that that all of Velada Borthan would come to taste the drug."

THAT answer seemed to frighten her: she drew back, she touched the tips of her fingers to her lips, perhaps becoming aware for the first time of the intensity of her bondbrother's madness. In speaking those words I was not uttering mere rhetorical overstatement, and something of my conviction must have reached Halum. She saw that I believed and, seeing the depth of my committment, feared for me.

Noim spent many of the days that followed away from his lands, traveling to Salla City on some

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family business and to the Plain of Nand to inspect property he was thinking of buying. In his absence I was master of the estate, for the servants, whatever they might think of my private life, did not dare to question my authority to my face. Daily I rode out to oversee the workers in Noim's fields and Halum rode with me. Actually little overseeing was demanded of me. This was midway in the seasons between planting and harvest and the crops looked after themselves. We rode for pleasure mainly, pausing here for a swim, there for a lunch at the edge of the woods. I showed her the stormshield pens, which did not please her, and took her among the gentler animals of the grazing fields, who came up and amiably nuzzled her.

These long rides gave us hours each day to talk. I had not spent so much time with Halum since childhood and we grew wonderfully close. We were cautious with one another at first, not wishing to get too near the bone with our questions, but soon we spoke as bondkin should. I asked her why it was she had never married and she answered me simply, "One never encountered a suitable man." Did she regret having gone without husband and children? No, she said, she regretted nothing, for her life had been tranquil and rewarding; yet there was wistfulness in her tone. I could not press her farther. On her part she questioned me about the Sumaran drug, trying to learn from me what merits it had that had led me to run such risks. I was amused by the way she phrased her inquiries: trying to sound earnest and sympathetic and objective, yet unable to hide her horror at what I had done. It was as though her bondbrother had run amok and butchered twenty people in a marketplace, and she now wished to discover, by means of patient and good-humored questioning, just what had been the philosophical basis that had led me to take up mass murder. I also tried to maintain a temperate and dispassionate manner, so that I would not sear her with my intensity as I had done in that first interchange. I avoided all evangelizing and, as calmly and soberly as I could, explained to her the effects of the drug, the benefits I gained from it and my reasons for rejecting the stony isolation of self that the Covenant imposes on us. Shortly a curious metamorphosis came over both her attitude and mine. She became less the highborn lady striving with well-meant warmth to understand the criminal, and more the student attempting to grasp the mysteries revealed by an initiated master. And I became less the descriptive reporter and more the proph-

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et of a new dispensation. I spoke in flights of lyricism of the raptures of soulsharing; I told her of the strange wonder of the early sensations, as one begins to open, and of the blazing moment of union with another human consciousness; I depicted the experience as something far more intimate than any meeting of souls one might have with one's bondkin, or any visit to a drainer. Our conversations became monologs. I lost myself in verbal ecstasies and came down from them at times to see Halum, silver-haired and eternally young, her eyes sparkling and her lips parted in total fascination. The outcome was inevitable. One scorching afternoon as we walked slowly through the aisles in a field of grain that rose chest-high on her, she said without warning, "If the drug is available to you here, may your bondsister share it with you?" I had converted her.

THAT night I dissolved some pinches of the powder in two flasks of wine. Halum looked uncertain as I handed one to her and her uncertainty rebounded to me, so that I hesitated to go through with our project; but then she gave me a magical smile of tenderness and drained her flask. "There is no flavor of it," she said, as I drank. We sat talking in Noim's trophy hall, decked with hornfowl spears and draped with stormshield furs, and as the drug began to take effect Halum started to shiver; I pulled a thick black hide from the wall, draped it about her shoulders and through it I held her until the chill was past.

Would this go well? Despite all my propagandizing I was frightened. In every man's life there is something he feels driven to do, something that pricks him at the core of his soul as long as it remains undone—yet as he approaches the doing of it he will know fear, for perhaps to fulfill the obsession will bring him more pain than pleasure. So with Halum and me and the Sumaran drug. But my fear ebbed as the drug took hold. Halum was smiling. Halum was smiling.

The wall between our souls became a membrane, through which we could slide at will. Halum was the first to cross it. I hung back, paralyzed by prudery, thinking even now that it would be an intrusion on my bondsister's maidenhood for me to enter her mind and also a violation of the commandment against bodily intimacies between bond-kin. So I dangled in this absurd trap of contradictions, too inhibited to practice my own creed, for some moments after the last barriers had fallen; meanwhile Halum, realizing at last that nothing prevented her, slipped unhesitatingly into my spirit. My in-

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stant response was to try to shield myself: I did not want her to discover this or this or that and particularly to learn of my physical desire for her. But after a moment of this embarrassed flurrying I ceased trying to plaster my soul with figleaves and went across into Halum, allowing the true communion to begin, the inextricable entanglement of selves.

I found myself—it would be more accurate to say, I lost myself—in corridors with glassy floors and silvered walls, through which played a cool sparkling light, like the crystalline brightness one sees reflected from the white sandy bottom of a shallow tropical cove. This was Halum's virginal inwardness. In niches along these corridors, neatly displayed, were the shaping factors of her life, memories, images, odors, tastes, visions, fantasies, disappointments, delights. A prevaling purity governed everything. I saw no trace of sexual ecstasies, nothing of the fleshly passions. I cannot tell you whether Halum, out of modesty, took care to shield the area of her sexuality from my probings or had thrust it so far from her own consciousness that I could not detect it.

She met me without fear and joined me in joy. I have no doubt of that. When our souls blended the union was complete, without reservation, without qualification. I swam through the glittering depths of her and the grime of my soul dropped from me: she was healing, she was cleansing. Was I staining her even as she was refining and purifying me? I cannot say. We surrounded and engulfed one another, supported one another and interpenetrated one another; and here mingling with my self was the self of Halum, who all my life had been my staff and my courage, my ideal and my goal, this cool incorruptible perfect incarnation of beauty; and perhaps as this corruptible self of mine put on incorruption, the first corrosive plaque sprouted on her shining incorruptibility. I cannot say. I came to her and she came to me. At one point in our journey through one another I encountered a zone of strangeness, where something seemed coiled and knotted: and I remembered that time in my youth, when I was setting out from Salla City on my flight into Glin, when Halum had embraced me at Noim's house and I thought I detected in her embrace a tremor of barely suppressed passion, a flicker of the hunger of the body. For me. For me. And I thought that I had found that zone of passion again, only when I looked more closely at it, it was gone, and I beheld the pure gleaming metallic surface of her soul. Perhaps both the first time and the second it was something I manufactured out of my own

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churning desires and projected on her. I cannot say. Our souls were twined; I could not have known where I left off and Halum began.

We emerged from the trance. The night was half gone. We blinked, we shook our foggy heads, we smiled uneasily. There is always that moment, coming out of the drug's soul-intimacy, when one feels abashed, one thinks one has revealed too much and one wants to retract what one has given. Fortunately that moment is usually brief. I looked at Halum and felt my body afire with holy love, a love that was not at all of the flesh, and I started to say to her, as Schweiz had once said to me, *I love you.* But I choked on the word. The "I" was trapped in my teeth, like a fish in a weir. *I. I. I. I love you, Halum. I. If I could only say it. I.* It would not come. It was there, but could not get past my lips. I took her hands between mine—she smiled a serene moon-like smile and it would have been so easy then to hurl out the words, except that something imprisoned them. *I. I.* How could I speak to Halum of love and couch my love in the syntax of the gutter? I thought then that she would not understand, that my obscenity would shatter everything. Foolishness: our souls had been one, how then could a mere phrasing of words disturb anything? Out with it! *I love you.* Faltering, I said, "There is—such love in one—for you—such love, Halum—"

She nodded as if to say, *Don't speak, your clumsy words break the spell.* As if to say, *Yes, there is in one such love for you also, Kinnall.* As if to say, *I love you, Kinnall.* Lightly she rose to her feet and went to the window: cold summer moonlight on the formal garden of the great house, the bushes and trees white and still. I came up behind her and touched her at the shoulders, very gently. She wriggled and made a little purring sound. I thought all was well with her. I was certain all was well with her.

We held no post-mortems on what had taken place between us this evening. That, too, seemed to threaten a puncturing of the mood. We could discuss our trance tomorrow, and all the tomorrows beyond that. I went with her back to her room, not far down the hallway from my own, kissed her cheek timidly and had a sisterly kiss from her; she smiled again and closed the door behind her. In my own room I sat a while awake, reliving everything. The missionary fervor was kindled anew in me. I would become an active messiah again, I vowed, going up and down this land of Salla spreading the creed of love; no more would I hide here at my bondbrother's place, broken and adrift, a hopeless exile in my own nation. Stirron's

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warning meant nothing to me. How could he drive me from Salla? I would make a hundred converts in a week. A thousand, ten thousand. I would give the drug to Stirron himself and let the septarch proclaim the new dispensation from his own throne! Halum had inspired me. In the morning I would set out, seeking disciples.

There was a sound in the courtyard. I looked out and saw a groundcar: Noim had returned from his business trip. He entered the house; I heard him in the hallway, passing my room; then came the sound of knocking. I peered into the corridor. He stood by Halum's door, talking to her. I could not see her. What was this, that he would go to Halum, who was nothing but a friend to him, and fail to greet his own bondbrother? Unworthy suspicions woke in me—unreal accusations. I forced them away. The conversation ended; Halum's door closed; Noim, without noticing me, continued toward his own bedroom.

Sleep was impossible for me. I wrote a few pages, but they were worthless and at dawn I went out to stroll in the gray mists. It seemed to me that I heard a distant cry. Some animal seeking its mate, I thought. Some lost beast wandering at daybreak.

I WAS alone at breakfast. That was unusual but not surprising: Noim, coming home in the middle of the night after a long drive, would have wanted to sleep late and doubtless the drug had left Halum exhausted. My appetite was powerful and I ate for the three of us, all the while planning my schemes for dissolving the Covenant. As I sipped my tea one of Noim's grooms burst wildly into the dining hall. His cheeks were blazing and his nostrils were flared, as if he had run a long way and were close to collapse. "Come," he cried, gasping. "The stormshields—" He tugged at my arm, half dragging me from my seat. I rushed out after him. He was already far down the unpaved road that led to the stormshield pens. I followed, wondering if the beasts had escaped in the night, wondering if I must spend the day chasing monsters again. As I neared the pens I saw no signs of a breakout, no clawed tracks, no torn fences. The groom clung to the bars of the biggest pen, which held nine or ten stormshields. I looked in. The animals were clustered, bloody-jawed, bloody-furred, around some ragged meaty haunch. They were snarling and quarreling over the last scraps of flesh; I could see traces of their feast scattered across the ground. Had some unfortunate farm beast strayed among these killers by darkness? How could such a thing have happened? And why would the groom

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see fit to haul me from my breakfast to show it to me? I caught his arm and asked him what was so strange about the sight of stormshields devouring their kill. He turned a terrible face to me and blurted in a strangled voice, "The lady—the lady—"

XX

NOIM was brutal with me. "You lied," he said. "You denied you were carrying the drug, but you lied. And you gave it to her last night. Yes? Yes? Yes? Don't hide anything now, Kinnall. You gave it to her!"

"You spoke with her," I said. I could barely manage words. "What did she tell you?"

"One stopped by her door because one thought one heard the sound of sobbing," Noim answered. "One inquired if she felt well. She came out: her face was strange, it was full of dreams, her eyes were as blank as pieces of polished metal and yes, yes, she had been weeping. And one asked what was wrong, whether there had been any trouble here. No, she said, all was well. She said you and she had talked all evening. Why was she weeping, then? She shrugged and smiled and said it was a female thing, an unimportant thing—women weep all the time, she said, and need give no explanations. And she smiled again and closed the door. But that look in her eyes—it was the drug, Kinnall! You gave it to her against all your vows! And now— and now—"

"Please," I said softly. But he went on shouting, loading me with accusations, and I could not reply.

The grooms had reconstructed everything. They had found the path of Halum's feet in the dew-moist sandy road. They had found ajar the door of the house that gives access to the stormshield pens. They had found marks of forcing on the inner door that leads to the feeding gate itself. She had gone through; she had carefully opened the feeding gate and just as carefully closed it behind her, to loose no killers on the sleeping estate; then she had offered herself to the waiting claws. All this between darkness and dawn, perhaps even while I strolled in a different part. That cry out of the mists. . .

Why? Why? Why? Why?

BY EARLY afternoon such few possessions as I had were packed. I asked Noim for the loan of a groundcar and he granted it with a brusque wave of his fingers. There was no question of my remaining here any longer. Not only were echoes of Halum resonating everywhere—I also had to go where I could think undisturbed, examine all that I had done and

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that I hoped to do. Nor did I wish to be here when the district police carried out their inquest into Halum's death.

Had she been unable to face me again, the morning after having given her soul away? She had gone gladly enough into the sharing of selves. But afterward, in that rush of guilty reappraisal that often follows the first opening, she may have felt another way: old habits of reticence reasserting themselves, a sudden cascading sense of horror at what she had revealed. And the quick irreversible decision, the frozen-faced trek to the stormshield pens, the ill-considered passing of the final gate, the moment of regret-within-regret as the animals pounced and she realized she had carried her atonement too far. Was that it? I could think of no other explanation for that plunge from serenity to despair, except that it was a second thought, a reflex of shock that swept her to doom. And I was without a bond-sister— and had lost bondbrother, too, for Noim's eyes were merciless when he looked at me. Was this what I had intended when I dreamed of opening souls?

"Where will you go?" Noim asked. "They'll jail you in Manneran. Take one step into Glin with your drug and you'll be flayed. Stirron will hound you out of Salla. Where, then, Kinnall? Threish? Velis? Or maybe Umbis, eh? Dabis? No! By the gods, it will be Sumara Borthan, won't it? Yes. Among your savages—and you'll have all the selfbaring you'll need there, yes? Yes?"

Quietly I said, "You forget the Burnt Lowlands, Noim. A cabin in the desert—a place to think, a place of peace—there is so much one must try to understand now—"

"The Burnt Lowlands? Yes, that's good, Kinnall. The Burnt Lowlands in high summer. A fiery purge for your soul. Go there, yes. Go."

ALONE I drove northward along the flank of the Huishtors, and then westward, on the road that leads to Kongoroi and Salla's Gate. More than once I thought of swerving the car and sending it tumbling over the highway's rim and making an end. More than once, as the first light of day touched my eyelids in some back-country hostelry, I thought of Halum and had to struggle to leave my bed, for it seemed so much easier to go on sleeping. Day and night and day and night and day, and a few days more, and I was deep into West Salla, ready to go up the mountains and through the gate. While resting one night in a town midway into the uplands I discovered that an order was out in Salla for my arrest. Kinnall Darival, the septarch's son, a man

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of thirty years, of this height and having these features, brother to the Lord Stirron, was wanted for monstrous crimes: selfbaring and the use of a dangerous drug, which against the explicit orders of the septarch he was offering to the unwary. By means of this drug the fugitive Darival had driven his own bondsister insane and, in her madness, she had perished in a horrible way. Therefore all citizens of Salla were enjoined to apprehend the evildoer, for whom a heavy reward would be paid.

If Stirron knew why Halum had died, then Noim had told him everything. I was lost. When I reached Salla's Gate I would find officers of the West Sallan constabulary waiting for me, for my destination was known. Why had the announcement not informed the populace that I was heading for the Burnt Lowlands? Possibly Noim had held back some of what he knew.

I had no choice but to go forward. It would take me days to reach the coast and I would find all of Salla's ports altered for me when I got there; even if I slipped on board a vessel, where would I go? Glin? Manneran? It was similarly hopeless to think of my getting somehow across the Huish or the Woyn into the neighboring provinces: I was already proscribed in Manneran and surely I would find a chilly greeting in Glin. The Burnt Lowlands it would have to be, then. I would stay there some while and then, perhaps, try to make my way out via one of the Threishtop passes to start a new life on the western coast. Perhaps.

I bought provisions at a place that served the needs of hunters entering the Lowlands: dried food, some weapons, and condensed water, enough to last me by careful expansion for several moontimes. As I made my purchases I thought the townsfolk were eyeing me strangely. Did they recognize me as the depraved prince whom the septarch sought? No one moved to seize me. Possibly they knew there was a cordon across Salla's Gate and would take no risks with such a brute when there were police in plenty to get me on top of Kongoroi. Whatever the reason, I got out of the town unbothered, and set out now on the final stretch of the highway. In the past I had come this way only in winter when snow lay deep; even now there were patches of dirty whiteness in shadowy corners. As the road rose the snow thickened, until near Kongoroi's double summit everything lay mantled in it. Timing my ascent carefully, I managed things so that I came to the great pass well after sundown, hoping that darkness would protect me in case of a roadblock. But the gate was unguarded. My car's

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lights were off as I drove the last distance—I half expected to go over the edge. I made the familiar left turn that brought me into Salla's Gate and I saw no one there. Stirron had not had time to close the western border—or did not think I would be so mad as to flee that way. I went forward, through the pass and slowly down the switchbacks on the western face of Kongoroi. When dawn overtook me I was into the Burnt Lowlands, choking in the heat but safe.

XXI

NEAR the place where the hornfowl nest I found this cabin—about where I remembered it to be. It was without plumbing, nor were the walls whole, yet it would do. It would do. The awful heat of the place would be my purge. I set up housekeeping inside, laying out my things, unpacking the journal paper I had bought for this record of my life and deeds, setting the jeweled case containing the last of the drug in a corner, piling my clothing above it, sweeping away the red sand. On my first full day of residence I busied myself camouflaging my groundcar, so that it would not betray my presence when searchers came: I drove it into a shallow ravine and collected woody ground plants to make a covering for it, throwing sand atop the interwoven stems of the plants. Only sharp eyes would see the car when I was done. I made careful note of the place, lest I fail to find it myself when I was ready to leave.

For some days I simply walked the desert, thinking. I went to the place where the hornfowl struck down my father and had no fear of the sharp-beaked circling birds: let them have me too. I considered the events of my time of changes, asking myself, *Is this what you wanted? Is this what you hoped to bring about? Does this satisfy you?* I relived each of my many soulsharings, from that with Schweiz to that with Halum, asking, *Was this good? Were there mistakes that could have been avoided? Did you gain—or did you lose by what you did?* And I concluded that I had gained more than I had lost, although my losses had been terrible ones. My only regrets were for poor tactics, not for faulty principles. If I had stayed with Halum until her uncertainties had fled she might not have given way to the shame that destroyed her. If I had been more open with Noim—if I had stayed in Manneran to confront my enemies—if—if—if—and yet I had no regrets for having done my changing, only for having bungled my revolution of the soul. For I was convinced of the wrongness of the Covenant and of our way of life. Your way of life. That

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Halum had seen fit to kill herself after two hours of experiencing human love was the most scathing possible indictment of the Covenant.

And finally—not too many days ago—I—began to write what you have been reading. My fluency surprised me; perhaps I verged on glibness, though it was hard for me at first to use the grammar I imposed on myself. *I am Kinnall Darival and I mean to tell you all about myself.* So I began my memoir. Have I been true to that intent? Have I concealed anything? Day upon day my pen had scratched paper and I have put myself down whole for you, with no cosmetic alterations of the record. In this sweatbox of a cabin have I laid myself bare. Meanwhile I have had no contact with the outside world except for occasional hints, possibly irrational, that Stirron's agents are combing the Burnt Lowlands for me. I believe that guards are posted at the gates leading into Salla, Glin and Manneran; and probably at the western passes as well; and also in Stroin Gap, in case I try to make my way to the Gulf of Sumar through the Wet Lowlands. My luck has held well, but soon they must find me. Shall I wait for them? Or shall I move on, trusting to fortune, hoping to find an unguarded exit? I have this thick manuscript. I value it now more than life itself. If you could read it, if you could see how I have stumbled and staggered toward knowledge of self, if you could receive from it the vibrations of my mind—I have put everything down, I think, in this autobiography, in this record of self, in this document unique in the history of Velada Borthan. If I am captured here my book will be captured with me and Stirron will have it burned.

I must move on then.

A sound? Engines?

A groundcar is coming swiftly toward my cabin over the flat red land. I am found. It is done. At least I was able to write this much.

FIVE days have passed since the last entry and I am still here. The groundcar was Noim's. He came not to arrest me but to rescue me. Cautiously, as if expecting me to open fire on him, he crept about my cabin, calling, "Kinnall? Kinnall?" I went outside. He tried to smile but was too tense to manage it. He said, "One thought you would be somewhere near this place. The place of the hornfowl—it still haunts you, eh?"

"What do you want?"

"Stirron's patrols are searching for you, Kinnall. Your path was traced as far as Salla's Gate. They know you're in the Burnt Lowlands. If Stirron knew you as well as your bondbrother does, he'd

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come straight here with his troops. Instead they're searching to the south. The theory is that you mean to go into the Wet Lowlands—to the Gulf of Sumar—and get a ship to Sumara Borthan. But they're bound to start hunting for you in this region once they discover you haven't been down there."

"And then?"

"You'll be arrested. Tried. Convicted. Jailed or executed. Stirron thinks you're the most dangerous man on Velada Borthan."

"I am," I said.

Noim gestured toward the car. "Get in. We'll slip through the blockade. Into West Salla, somehow, and down to the Woyn. The Duke of Sumar will meet you and put you aboard some vessel heading out. You can be in Sumara Borthan by next moonrise."

"Why are you helping me, Noim? Why should you bother? I saw the hate in your eyes when I left you?"

"Hate? Hate? No, Kinnall, no hate, only sorrow. One is still your—" He paused. With an effort, he said, "*I'm* still your bondbrother. I'm pledged to your welfare. How can I let Stirron hunt you like a beast? Come. Come. I'll get you safely out of here."

"No."

"No?"

"We're certain to be caught. Stirron will have you, too, for aiding a fugitive. He'll seize your lands. He'll break your rank. Don't make a useless sacrifice for me, Noim."

"I came all the way into the Burnt Lowlands to fetch you. If you think I'll go back without—"

"Let's not quarrel over it," I said. "Even if I escape, what is there for me? To spend the rest of my life hiding in the jungles of Sumara Borthan—among people whose language I can't speak and whose ways are alien to me? No. No. I'm tired of exile. Let Stirron take me."

Persuading Noim to leave me here was no little task. We stood in the midday fire for eternal minutes, arguing vehemently. He was determined to effect this heroic rescue, despite the almost certain probability that we would both be captured. This he was doing out of a sense of duty, not out of love, for I could see that he still held Halum's death to my account. I would not have his disgrace scored against me as well and told him so: he had done nobly to make this journey, but I could not go with him. Finally he began to yield, but only when I swore I would at least make some effort to save myself. I promised that I would set out for the western mountains instead of sitting where Stirron would surely find me. If I reached Velis or Threish safely, I said, I would notify Noim in some way, so that he

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would cease to fear my fate. And then I said, "There is one thing you can do for me." I brought my manuscript out of the cabin—a great heap of paper, red scribbling on grayish, rough sheets. In this, I said, he would find the whole story. I asked him to read it and to pass no judgment on me until he had. "You will find things in here that will horrify and disgust you," I warned him. "But I think you'll also find much that will open your eyes and your soul. Read it, Noim. Read it with care. Think about my words." And I asked one last vow of him, by our oath of bonding: that he safely preserve my book even if the temptation came over him to burn it. "These pages hold my soul," I told him. "Destroy the paper and you destroy me. If you loathe what you read hide the book, but do no harm to it. What shocks you now may not shock you a few years from now. And some day you may want to show my book to others, so that you can explain what manner of man your bondbrother was and why he did what he did." *And so that you may change them as I hope my book will change you*, I said silently. Noim vowed this vow. He took my sheaf of pages and stored them in the hold of his groundcar. We embraced; he asked me again if I would not ride away with him; again I refused; I made him say once more he would read my book and preserve it; once more he swore he would; then he drove slowly toward the east. I entered the cabin. The place where I had kept my manuscript was empty and I felt a sudden hollowness, I suppose much like that of a woman who has carried a child for the full seven moontimes and now finds her belly flat again. I had poured all of myself into those pages. Now I was nothing and the book was all. Would Noim read it? I thought so. And would he preserve it? Very likely he would, though he might hide it in the darkest corner of his house. And would he some day show it to others? This I do not know. But if you have read what I have written it is through the kindness of Noim Condorit; and if he has let it be read—then I have prevailed over his soul after all, as I hope to prevail over yours.

I HAD said to Noim that I would remain in the cabin no longer but would set out for the west in an attempt to save myself. But that sweltering shack had become my home. I stayed a day, another day and a third, doing nothing, wandering the blazing solitude of the Burnt Lowlands, watching the hornfowl circle. On the fifth day, as you perhaps are able to see, I fell into the habit of autobiography again, sat down at the place where I had lately

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spent so many hours sitting and wrote a few new pages to describe my visit from Noim. Then I let three days more go by, telling myself that on the fourth I would dig my groundcar out of the red sand and head westward. But on the morning of that fourth day Stirron and his men found my hiding place and now it is evening of that day and I have an hour or two more to write, by the grace of the Lord Stirron. And when I have done with this, I will write no more.

THEY came in six well-armed groundcars, surrounded my cabin and called on me through loudspeakers to surrender. I had no hope of resisting them, nor any desire to try. Calmly—for what use was fear?—I showed myself, hands upraised, at the cabin door. They left their cars and I was amazed to find Stirron himself among them, drawn out of his palace into the Lowlands for an out-of-season hunting party with his brother as quarry. He wore all his finery of office. Slowly he walked toward me. I had not seen him in some years and was appalled by the signs of age on him: shoulders rounded, head thrust forward, hair thinning, face deeply lined, eyes yellowed and dim. The profits of half a lifetime of supreme power. We regarded one another in silence, like two strangers seeking a point of contact. I tried to find in him that boy, my playmate, my elder brother, whom I had loved and lost so long ago, and I saw only a grim old man with trembling lips. A septarch is trained to mask his inner feelings, yet Stirron was able to hold nothing secret from me, nor could he keep one consistent expression: I saw in his face, one tumbling across the other, tokens of imperial rage, bewilderment, sorrow, contempt, and something that I took to be a sort of suppressed love. I spoke first, inviting him into my cabin for a conference. He hesitated, perhaps thinking I had assassination in mind, but after a moment he accepted in right kingly manner, waving to his bodyguard to wait outside. When we were alone another silent spell obtained, which this time he broke, saying, "One has never felt such pain, Kinnall. One scarcely believes what one has heard about you. That you should stain our father's memory—"

"Is it such a stain, Lord Septarch?"

"To foul the Covenant? To corrupt the innocent—your bondsister among the victims? What have you been doing, Kinnall? *What have you been doing?*"

A terrible fatigue came over me and I closed my eyes, for I scarcely knew where to begin explaining. After a moment I found

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strength. I reached toward him, smiling, taking his hand, and said, "I love you, Stirron."

"How sick you are!"

"To talk of love? But we came out of the same womb! Am I not to love you?"

"Is this how you talk now, only in filth?"

"I talk as my heart commands me."

"You are not only sick but sickening," said Stirron. He turned away and spat on the sandy floor. He seemed a remote medieval figure to me, trapped behind his dour kingly face, imprisoned in his jewels of office and his robes of state, speaking in gruff, distant tones. How could I reach him?

I said, "Stirron, take the Sumaran drug with me. I have a little left. I'll mix it for us. We'll drink it together and in an hour or two our souls will be one and you'll understand. I swear, you'll understand. Will you do it? Kill me afterward if you still want to, but take the drug first." I began to bustle about, making ready the potion. Stirron caught my wrist and halted me. He shook his head, with the slow, heavy gesture of one who feels an infinite sadness.

"No," he said. "Impossible."

"Why?"

"You will not fuddle the mind of the prime septarch."

"I'm interested in *reaching* the mind of my brother Stirron!"

"As your brother, one wishes only that you may be healed. As prime septarch, one must avoid harm, for one belongs to one's pepple."

"The drug is harmless, Stirron."

"Was it harmless for Halum Helalam?"

"Are you a frightened virgin?" I asked. "I've given the drug to scores of people. Halum is the only one who reacted badly—Noim too, I suppose, but he got over it. And—"

"The two people in the world closest to you," said Stirron, "and the drug harmed them both. Now you offer it to your brother?"

It was hopeless. I asked him again, several times, to risk an experiment with the drug, but of course he would not touch it. And would it have availed me anything if he had? I would have found only iron in his soul.

I asked, "What will happen to me now?"

"A fair trial, followed by an honest sentence."

"Which will be what? Execution? Imprisonment for life? Exile?"

Stirron shrugged. "It is for the court to decide. Do you take one for a tyrant?"

"Stirron, why does the drug frighten you so? Do you know what it does? Can I make you see that it brings only love and under-

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standing? There's no need for us to live as strangers to each other, with blankets around our souls. We can speak ourselves out. We can reach forth. We can say 'I,' Stirron, and not have to apologize for having selves. *I. I. I.* We can tell each other what gives us pain and help each other to escape that pain." His face darkened; I think he was sure I was mad. I went past him to the place where I had put down the drug, quickly mixed it and offered a flask to him. He shook his head. I drank, impulsively gulping it, and offered the flask again to him. "Go on," I said. "Drink. Drink! It won't begin for a while. Take it now, so we'll be open at the same time. Please, Stirron!"

"I could kill you myself," he said, "without waiting for the court to act."

"Yes! Say it, Stirron! I! Myself! Say it again!"

"Miserable selfbarer. My father's son! If I talk to you in 'I,' Kinnall, it's because you deserve no better than filth from me."

"It doesn't need to be filth. Drink—and understand."

"Never."

"Why do you oppose it, Stirron? What frightens you?"

"The Covenant is sacred," he said. "To question the Covenant is to question the whole social order. Turn this drug of yours loose in the land and all reason collapses, all stability is lost. Do you think our forefathers were villains? Do you think they were fools? Kinnall, they understood how to create a lasting society. Where are the cities of Sumara Borthan? Why do they still live in jungle huts while we have built what we have built? You'd put us on their road, Kinnall. You'd break down the distinctions between right and wrong, so that in a short while law itself would be washed away and every man's hand would be lifted against his fellow—and where would be your love and universal understanding then? No, Kinnall. Keep your drug. One still prefers the Covenant."

"Stirron—"

"Enough. The heat is intolerable. You are arrested; now let us go."

BECAUSE the drug was in me Stirron agreed to let me have a few hours alone before we began the journey back to Salla, so that I would not have to travel while my soul was vulnerable to external sensations. A small mercy from the lord septarch: he posted two men as guards outside my cabin and went off with the others to hunt hownfowl until the coming of dusk.

Never had I taken the drug without a sharer. So the strangenesses came upon me and I was alone

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with them to hear the throbbings and the whinings and the rushings and then, as the walls fell away from my soul there was no one for me to enter and no one to enter me. Yet I could detect the souls of my guards—hard, closed, metallic—and I felt that with some effort I could reach even into them. But I did not, for as I sat by myself I was launched on a miraculous voyage, my self expanding and soaring until I encompassed this our entire planet and all the souls of mankind were merged into mine. And a wondrous vision came upon me. I saw my bond-brother Noim making copies of my memoir and distributing them to those he could trust. Other copies were made from those, to circulate through the provinces of Velada Borthan. And out of the southern land now came shiploads of the white powder, sought not merely by an elite, not only by the Duke of Sumar and the Marquis of Woyn, but by thousands of ordinary citizens, by people hungry for love, by those who found the Covenant turning to ashes, those who wished to reach one another's souls. And though the guardians of the old order did what they could to halt the movement, it could not be stopped, for the former Covenant had run its course and now it was clear that love and gladness could no longer be suppressed. Until at last a network of communication existed, shining filaments of sensory perception linking one to one to one to all. Until at last even the septarchs and the justiciars were swept up in the tide of liberation and all the world joined in joyous communion, each of us open to all, and the time of changes was complete; the new Covenant was established. I saw all this from my shabby cabin in the Burnt Lowlands. I saw the bright glow encompassing the world, shimmering, flickering, gaining power, deepening in hue. I saw walls crumbling. I saw the brilliant red blaze of universal love. I saw new faces, changed and exultant. Hands touching hands. Selves touching selves. This vision blazed in my soul for half a day, filling me with joy such as I had never experienced at any time, and my soaring spirit wandered in realms of dream. And only as the drug began to ebb from me did I realize that the vision was nothing but a fantasy.

Perhaps it will not always be a fantasy. Perhaps Noim will find readers for what I have written and perhaps others will be persuaded to follow my path until there are enough like me and the changes become irreversible and universal. It has happened before. I will disappear, I the forerunner, I the anticipator, I the martyred prophet. But what I

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have written will live and through me you will be changed. It may yet be that this is no idle dream.

This final page has been set down as twilight descends. The sun hastens toward the Huishtors. Soon, as Stirron's prisoner, I will follow it. I will take this little manuscript with me, hidden somewhere about me, and if I have good fortune I will find some way of giving it to Noim, so that it can be joined to the pages he has already had from me. I cannot say if I will succeed, nor do I know what will become of me and of my book. And you who read this are unknown to me. But I can say this: that if the two parts have become one and you read me complete—you may be sure that I have begun to prevail. Out of that joining can come only changes for Velada Borthan, changes for all of you. If you have read this far you must be with me in soul. So I say to you, my unknown reader, that I love you and reach my hand toward you, I who was Kinnall Darival, I who have opened the way, I who promised to tell you all about myself and who now can say that that promise has been fulfilled. Go and seek. Go and touch. Go and love. Go and be open. Go and be healed. ★

LETTERS 3

(Continued from page 2)

as shorthand for what can be better expressed without them.

3) 91% of you voted for *real-life sex in story content when it's important to the story*—and here again a few comments are in order.

Let's take excerpts from one of your letters:

. . . I think the best two stories in this issue are: I Will Fear No Evil *(conclusion)* and Darkside Crossing *. . . I am (not) a physician, scientist, engineer or a technician—would you believe Educator?*

I am not against real-life sex when it's important to the story: True. But it had better be damn important! If I want to read a sex novel (and I have at times) I will go buy a sex novel . . .

Bob Snow
San Bernardino, Cal.

You've made a point for me. That sex per se "always sells" is a popular fantasy—other topics have sold and will continue to sell as well or better.

But to pretend that sex doesn't exist is as much a fantasy. I will not, as several authors already know, buy a story simply because it has sex—but neither will I turn down a story for that sole reason.

Thank you for your vote.

A great many of you went to great pains to answer the questionnaire by letter rather than cut up an issue. The following note

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appended to answers to the poll, is a sample.

. . . I almost neglected answering your questionnaire in order to keep my Galaxy *intact. However, my feelings of near-duty got the best of me and I had to reply—late and sloppy.* (No, I was sloppy, placing the questionnaire where I did. —Ed.) *I do hope, however, I will be counted. Especially in this time of metamorphosis of my favorite magazine . . .*

Brent Higinbotham
Chelmsford, Mass.

Dear Mr. Jakobsson:

I already subscribe, so I'll not take advantage of your offer.

Just a few comments on your questionnaire. First, I like stories by a lot of other people besides those 9 listed. The novel-length serials are fine. The illustrations are good, but they are not all that important—the editorial content is what it's all about. The science-fact articles are okay, but don't make them too *technical. Just the same, I buy* Galaxy *for the fiction and the book reviews. As far as I'm concerned profanity in fiction shouldn't be censored, but don't go out of the way to insert it either. The next question confused me, but I'll say here that fantasy is fine (if you stop publishing it,* F&SF *will be the only quality purveyors of the form.*

One thing I've noticed in science fiction in the last 12 years is that the characterizations are getting better along with everything else. If sex is necessary to the story development, by all means let's have it. Sex is part of a human being's life.

Harold F. Metcalf
Portland, Ore.

. . . Heinlein should make war and let Sturgeon make love. IWFNE *was fun but couldn't hold a candle to* The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress *. . .*

David Lee Powell
Bellevue, N.B.

. . . I cannot express my mind on the questions I circled with a simple Yes, No, True or False. I feel a little as though I'm being asked whether I prefer prudishness or obscenity . . .

Henri Lastrapes

. . . I am a grade school teacher and the wife of a chemical engineer. Much enjoyed your absolutely wonderful serial by Heinlein: I Will Fear No Evil. *I only wish it had not ended.*

John and I have been arguing for months as to whether the book is pornographic. I say yes; he says no. I think this is due to sex differences in viewpoints. We both agree that the story is not *repulsively pornographic and feel that this is the important factor.*

Mrs. John Caccione

The book is not pornographic by any definition I know.

I think all of you, without exception, have helped give *Galaxy* a new direction—may it reward you. —JAKOBSSON

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THE BUYER

LARRY EISENBERG

HE WAS tall, very dark-skinned, with shaggy uncut hair. But his clothes were elegant, cut by the finest Sentient tailor. He stood off at a distance, looking at me speculatively. I pretended not to notice him.

The dining console was somewhat different from those I was used to and I had a little trouble placing my breakfast order. As I sat there, somewhat baffled by the instructions on how to enter the proper code, he came over and sat down at my table.

"Can you use some help?" he asked amiably.

I nodded. He showed me how to enter an order for simulated ham and eggs. I pushed the ap-

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propriate buttons and a few minutes later, a steaming dish came up through the center table lift. It looked and tasted pretty good.

Then I realized that I had forgotten my manners.

"Would you like something?" I asked.

"No," he said. "I never eat when I'm on business."

"What's your business?"

He smiled.

"Right now you're my business."

I dug into the food and chewed it, pondering his remark and baffled at what he was getting at.

"I don't think I know you," I said. "Don't be offended. My memory was never of the best."

"We've never met," he said. "But I know you very well. I've got a business proposition to make to you."

I smiled. I had been prospecting in the Sentient hills for almost six years, sifting through the abandoned mineral mines for signs of gold. Once or twice I had found a small vein with enough paydirt to stake me for another year or two. But the few claims I had were worthless.

He seemed to sense what I was thinking.

"It's not your claims I'm interested in," he said. "I want to buy your name."

I chuckled.

"*That* ain't worth much," I said. I thought it was a pretty good joke on his part.

"I don't think you even know my name," I added.

He pronounced it clearly, each syllable getting exaggerated emphasis. I had never heard my name pronounced that way before but it was definitely mine.

"You think I'm joking," he said. "But I'm not. I'll give you fifty thousand Sentient credits for your name."

I was jolted into putting down my fork.

"That's a hell of a lot of money," I said.

It was more than I had made in the past ten years or was likely to make in the next ten.

"What the hell do you want with my name?" I said tartly.

"Fifty thousand credits," he said. "I got the name transfer forms right here. You sign on this line. I sign there. We go over to the town clerk and get it validated and I hand over fifty thousand credits in cash. The whole thing shouldn't take more than half an hour."

I put my dish back on the table center lift and pressed the BUS button. The dish slid out of sight. I picked up the napkin and wiped my mouth. Then I stood up.

"Thanks for helping me order," I said. "But I got to get going now."

"Sit down for a minute," he said soothingly. "You don't seem to

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catch on to what I'm saying. You'll never get a better deal as long as you live."

I sat down.

"Get this straight," I told him. "I ain't selling my name. It was my father's name and his father's before him. Besides, it ain't much of a name."

He pronounced my name again but this time it was all music and loving sounds.

"IT'S a beautiful name," he said. "You don't think I'd offer fifty thousand for just any name?"

He reached into his shirt pocket and withdrew a small notebook.

"There's some in here I didn't give more than five hundred for. But yours is worth every bit of what I'm offering."

"I ain't interested," I said.

He clucked his tongue.

★★★GALAXY STARS★★★

James Gunn, author of "The Message," the third stories in the series that began with "The Listeners" [Galaxy, August, 1968], began writing science fiction in 1948. Since then he has produced ten books and some sixty shorter works and has held a series of professional positions as paperback editor, university public relations director, college teacher —all reflecting his interests. He is the author of **This Fortress World, Star Bridge** [with Jack Williamson], **Station in Space, The Joy Makers, The Immortals, Future Imperfect, The Witching Hour** and **The Immortal,** and he edited **Man and the Future.**

The ABC-TV "Movie of the Week" and the 1970 series "The Immortal" were adapted from Jim's **The Immortals.** And **The Immortal** is his novelization of the pilot film screenplay. Jim summed up his experience with television and his opinions about science fiction on film in a recent article in **TV Guide.**

This Spring Bantam brought out a new edition of **The Joy Makers.** Dell will publish his new book, **The Burning,** this summer; and Scribner's has contracted to publish **The Listeners.**

Jim now is a full-time faculty member at the University of Kansas, from which he has two degrees and where he teaches fiction writing for the English department and a new course in science fiction as literature for the School of Journalism. He is working on a textbook about science fiction and putting on film a science-fiction course in which writers, editors and other authorities discuss aspects of the field they know best. He has a 90-year-old house, a 24-year-old marriage, two sons, 21 and 16, three Siamese cats and a dachshund. And if all that isn't enough, he was a candidate this year for president of the SFWA.

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"How old are you?" he said.

"Sixty-three," I lied.

I was close to sixty-eight.

"I got enough years left," I said, "to want my name wrapped around them. Fifty thousand credits is a lot of money but it ain't the same as a name."

"I could make it sixty," he said. "But that's my last offer."

Now sixty is only ten more than fifty and it shouldn't have made that much difference to me but it did. I was mighty close to closing the deal at that point. But I had one more question to ask.

"What will you do with my name if I sell it to you?"

He frowned.

"Do with it? I won't do anything with it."

I must have looked terribly puzzled because his brow clouded and then he began to laugh out loud.

"I see what you mean," he said. "You think that I'll use it some way. Maybe bring disgrace on your name."

"Sully it, is what I was thinking."

"I just want to own it," he said. "Some men accumulate real estate. Others want art objects or rare books. I like names. But it has to be mine, do you follow what I'm saying? The name has to *belong* to me. And when I take a fancy to it, I got to have it. And I pay the top price."

His eyes were all afire and his dark cheeks were gleaming with fresh sweat. He opened his wallet and counted out sixty thousand credits in fresh new bills. It was painful to look at all of that cash in one place.

"I'll take it," I said and I felt dirty all over.

AFTER the clerk had validated the form we shook hands.

"It's a good name," I said. "Take care of it."

"I will," he said, but he seemed to have lost interest. He was looking at another Terran with wrapped leggings around his ankles, who was walking down the dusty cobbled street.

"Excuse me," he said. "I see another prospect."

He shoved the validated form carelessly into his breast pocket and set out after the Terran. His tall thin body had come alive and his fingers were trembling slightly.

"You didn't say goodbye," I called after him, bitterly.

There were sixty thousand credits in my hand, too much to carry on my person. I went to the credit exchange to open an account

"In what name?" said the teller.

He was even less startled than I was at the fresh tears that suddenly spurted out of my eyes. ★

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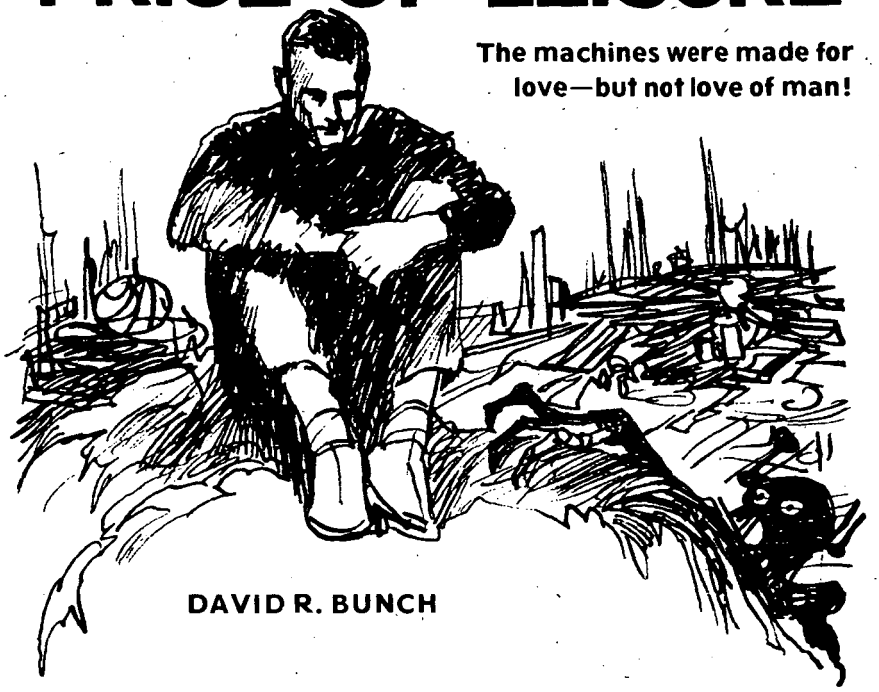
PRICE OF LEISURE

The machines were made for love—but not love of man!



DAVID R. BUNCH

I REMEMBER well how he looked that day, at the peak of his powers and self-confidence, already at thirty a world-renowned metal-people engineer—or, as we in the trade spoke about it at the great experiment center in that long-ago time, a peoplegeer. I recall how his black wild hair tossed, how strands fell athwart his beady burning eyes when he, the honored guest, almost shrieked, addressing the world convention, "Did God build you and me? Yes! But in the beginning. Since then He has not lifted a hand. It was not needed."

Deafening applause from the assembled thousands of metal-people engineers rose up in thunderous sanction, smote agreement-noise violently at the young man on the stage. When the yells and the thundering hands had stilled a little we waited anxiously for his next words. His urgent staring about, his pleading manner of standing

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with his hands cupped at us, all marked him as a man in the throes of a mission. "We are so far behind God," he cried, "in the field of this science that we should be ashamed. Each night, on our knees, we should say, 'God, I am ashamed, forgive me. I am sad that I have moved so slowly, been a dull metal-people engineer.' But all shall soon be remedied by my plan. God never meant that we, year after year, should go on, tediously fashioning our servants. Man was meant for leisure times. And the contemplation of his body and its pleasure-needs. Gentlemen, it is my studied belief that in all the universe there is none to equal the pleasure potential of man in his flesh."

Applause crashed up and out from many beating palms and reverberated like great deep drumbeats from the curves of the egg-shaped auditorium.

"Now, to achieve more leisure time: In many central places we shall put our structures, buildings of a size to dwarf any yet attempted. They will not be greatly tall, but they will cover many many acres, lying like gigantic metal orange halves on the flat places. In these we must store our parts. Or I should say, *their* parts." He paused as if half expecting some recognition of humor. But there was never a titter. We were too tense for jest.

"We must make the parts at first," he went on, "as we have made the steel-folk. We shall store the parts so the buildings built like halves of oranges can be, in a manner of speaking, termed founts-of-life." Angry mutterings of disappointment were beginning to come from the audience now. And one renowned metal-people engineer, who had once been a robot engineer and was much older than the young man on the stage, was heard to curse and say something to the effect that the young fool was about to advocate a plan that had been tried more than thirty years ago, tried and found wanting before this young fool was born.

"Ah, no," the young man protested, as if sensing the nature of their disappointment. "I am not thinking of that ancient plan of the late Professor Blanochon. I am, of course, familiar with it—that stingy unimaginative scheme that called for self-repair of the worn or injured servants of another age, the unsophisticated robots. In that there was no progress, no imagination, no grasp of the true problem. The robot, after a certain period of usually good service to man, grew in lassitude, his wires old, his plates and power wafers jaded. He made no honest attempt to repair himself well, wishing rather to die back to some easy junk yard. But my plan calls for a whole new deal for steel-folk. You might call it the steel-man's chance for bliss,

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his emancipation. But it also means the emancipation—finally the almost total emancipation—of man from the toil of making servants merely to—do I say merely? nay, boundlessly—receive the services of servants. TO GIVE MAN MORE LEISURE TIME!" The last sentence was grandly shouted.

THE applause rose and became prolonged. We stood at our seats and danced. We were with this man! When the bedlam had ceased a little he went on. He outlined his plan while the huge conclave of world metal-people engineers held to the edges of their seats. The entire working force of present day steel-folk, he explained, must be scrapped—junked as out of date. In the new population of servants, to be created by the engineers, there must be the sexes, three, or perhaps more correctly two true sexes and one work-horse nonsex which could, after certain nonsex service in the warehouse, be elevated to a sex. (Upon the elevation of a nonsex a sex would necessarily be demoted in the rotation necessary to keep the warehouse force and the sex groups at stable strength). Designations for the three groups would be hes, ses and hese. A hes would have his power unit on the right side of his chest; a ses would have hers on the left side; and a hese, the nonsex, would display the power unit in the middle of the chest.

On a day determined by local conditions, the quality and quantity of the work force and perhaps other considerations, best understood by the metal-people engineer in charge, all the hes and ses of a given district would be called together. Under the watchful supervision of the ranking engineer of that particular community each hes and ses would be required to remove a certain one of his or her power wafers from the power unit. On a gleaming steel table, perfectly bare except for a few carved signs of erotic significance to steel-folk (such as steel-shaving flowers bloomed on intricate balance-stems amidst lance-shaped bees without wings and iron balls mated, represented as whirling two-and-two in a perfectly clear, colorless oil) the wafers would be placed in two heaps, the hes wafers in one, the ses wafers in another. Then, with careful tabulation by the ranking peoplegeer, the hes and ses would file by the mating table and each be handed a wafer from the opposite-sex heap. To hasten the mechanics of mating, as a check and to keep everything decently routine, a peoplegeer-in-charge-of-love, merely a clerk-lieutenant sent from the central offices to assist the head peoplegeer of the district, would call out sex and numbers of correctly matched pairs, usually calling out

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the hes number first. For instance he would sing out, "Hes Twenty must have ses Ten-nine-six-four's love wafer and vice versa." And so it would go until all the pairs chosen for love at this particular call-up were correctly ready for mating. (Yes, it does seem rather a shabby and shallow plan-of-love and many a better one—and at least one worse one—at once come to mind. But I give you this plan exactly as outlined to that great conclave by the genius with wild dark hair and beady, flashing eyes.)

Their part of courtship over in a prearranged matching of wafers, hes 20 and ses 10964 would repair to a little cubicle out of sight of everyone and soon would come to vib-reactors of breathless eavesdroppers a tiny tink-tink sound; perhaps the listeners would feel a pleasant anticipatory thrill deep in the chambers of their own most delicate wires and plates, knowing that one happy pair were already toying with each other's power sections and exchanging wafers. When the lovers reappeared there might be wild metallic cheers or merely hoarse huzzas or perhaps just the blinking of bulb-eyes to show appreciation of a solemn occasion and a joyful one. But hes 20 and ses 10964 couldn't care less because they would be in love now and they would hurry off to the great metal building shaped like half an orange. There they would confront the workhorse hese. Perhaps he would say, "Gob doy, congrootulotions, yoy yoy!" Or if he were old and tired from his warehouse chores he might simply blink his bulbs and ask them to get on with it.

"Oh, see them," our speaker cried, carried away by his dream, "enter the steellov room, a place filled with those wonder-things we may term love objects of steel-folk." The black wild hair shook down, the eyes gleamed. "Steel balls balance on jets of rainbow-colored gas there to swing the steel lover's waltz constantly through the room; robot puppets of finest thread-wire and new-metal cavort unceasingly on a stage of ever-changing lights. And over all wafts an atmosphere of tiny robot-calipers interminably measuring lengths amidst the lance bees gently whirling in a clear cool light that does seem to shine beyond forever. From the lovers the unexplained sounds! Ah, it may be only earnest conversation. They emerge! They tell the hese what they have decided to do! He goes to the proper stack and picks out the proper frame. He gives them a steel-bound book of instructions —all the things, each detailed step, to rear the little frame right. And on the book's last page the frame stands whole, all his gleaming parts together, all the detail superimposed.

And under the picture appears this little verse:

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You held the future in my
lacks;
Think! Did you visit all
the right stacks?

"Gentlemen, picture the inward glow, which no steel-person could have experienced in the old days, when the happy pair clank off around the warehouse, the bare frame clasped between them. And know that these good steel parents are determined to visit all the right stacks and rear a sturdy accurately constructed steel-person according to the book. And they will do it! Then, the job finished, they will leave their creation at the warehouse—whether a hes a ses or a hese—for further disposition. Tomorrow, back to work—end of happy useful marriage—end of happy useful love . . . for a time . . . until next call-up . . . according to local conditions . . . quality and quantity of the work force . . . date set by metal-people engineer."

EVEN now, here in my extreme leisure on this high mountain top where no hes or ses or hese has yet come, I can see him and, calling up the dark vision, I can hear him crying, *Did God build you and me? Yes! But in the beginning. Since then He has not lifted a hand* . . . I can hear hear him pleading for man's leisure as on that great day when he spoke before the assembled giants of steel-folk engineering. But across his words a strange sound pounds me, nearer and nearer—like rocks on metal sheets and metal balls on stone. Yes, the warehouses are climbing the mountains; the steel-folk come chanting a song of happy love-power, their metal footsteps on the level places sounding like little pile drivers walking free, their scratchy holds on the sheer mountain stones sounding like cats whetting claws. In the Old Days . . . But I must not regard them in other than their true light. They are not angry; they are merely coming to work. They will whirl stones away like pebbles, dig holes that swallow hills—and they will level the mountain to build a new warehouse. You see, they are forced to expand because love has been strong. Almost from the first they saw no cause to wait for call-up by a metal-people engineer. And though many frames have been born out of wedlock and many a stack has been visited in sheer excess of free love, the steel-folk have prospered. And now they are crowding me—the last engineer, the last flesh-man, the last human being on earth—from the last mountain top of my world. Oh, they will not, I feel sure, even notice me waiting here amid more leisure—and terror—than any other man knew. I think they must stoop and whirl me from the mountain as of no use, as though I were a resting stone.

★

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(Continued from page 27)

it's no use. The whisper is all around us and it will take us, too. We are all one now. We have opened the eye that links us, wherever he is, with him."

"This is nonsense!" Wannemaker shouted. "Preposterous. I feel no presence. I hear no whisper. The ape's dead and that's all there is to it."

"Is it?" Sanderson asked sadly. "You may not hear the whisper of the waves on the eternal sea but there is another whisper now. Listen! Do you hear anything outside—there, in the morning before the birds shake off their sleep and sing?"

"I hear—I hear nothing!" swore Wannemaker.

"Not—a squeaking? I hear the squeaking of an army out there. They are coming for us, Minister, and there is nothing we can do. It is as inevitable as the soul of Rastus, waiting for us in the dark."

"I—I do hear something now. It's—it's—but it can't be!"

"I am afraid it is, Minister."

He did not need to join Wannemaker at the window with the constables with their rifles blazing in the utter futility of their terror. He sat beside Angela Styles and held her hand. He knew what was coming for them under the rising morning mist. A vast brown army, closing in on the house, the whole country, brown as far as the eye could reach. Linked with all its fellows in the world, the rat, too, had escaped. ★

Want a way out of whatever it is you're in? Then read—

IF

The Magazine of Alternatives

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THIS SPACE CONTRIBUTED BY THE PUBLISHER AS A PUBLIC SERVICE

MARGUERITE PIAZZA, PHOTOGRAPHED BY BERT STERN

The doctor told me, "Marguerite, you can be alive and ugly, or beautiful and dead."

The day I first noticed the small pink spot on my cheek, I had other things on my mind. The New York papers said, "Marguerite Piazza opens at the Persian Room". I covered the spot with makeup, walked out into the spotlight, and forgot it—forgot everything—in the joy of singing.

It wasn't until the spot began to spread, that I went to a cancer specialist. The day the doctor told me I'd have to have radical face surgery, I was sure my career was over. It was no longer a matter of saving my looks. Just of saving my life.

They kept the mirrors in my hospital room covered for a week. And yet today, thanks to the fantastic skill of the surgeons, I sing in the spotlight again. I let myself be photographed full-face by a famous photographer of glamorous women. And I am alive.

So now you know why I am appealing to you on behalf of the American Cancer Society. To give money. To get regular checkups. And to pay attention to cancer's warning signals.

You know, there's something much worse than finding out you have cancer. And that's *not* finding out.

American Cancer Society
We want to wipe out cancer in your lifetime.

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What is it?

A black dot, circle, sphere, neutron, eye pupil, tunnel opening, planet, hole, cosmos?

Depending on your perspective, knowledge, imagination, the answer can be simple or complex, commonplace or extraordinary, definite or infinite.

We'd like to introduce you to some uniquely gifted authors who have created an exciting, mind-stretching literature. Writers who can look at a dot or a pebble and see a universe of sub-atomic particles. Who can speculate on the incredible number of interdependent cells that make up a human body and envision whole planetary life forms interconnected the same way.

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